# micro Adventurer

The computer strategy and simulation magazine

October 1984

75p

Focus on Philosopher's Quest

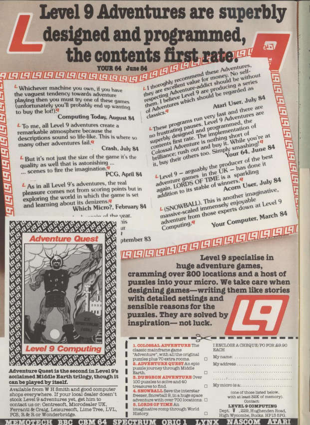
Enter the mysterious world of Snowball



Battle of Midway

Starcross hints

WIN 25 Dungeon Builders from Dream s/w


Level 9 Adventures are superbly designed and programmed, the contents first rate.
YOUR 64 June 84
Whichever machine you own, if you have the vaguest tendency towards adventure playing then you must try one of these games (unfortunately you'll probably end up wanting to buy the lot!).
Computing Today, August 84
To me, all Level 9 adventures create a remarkable atmosphere because the descriptions sound so life-like. This is where so many other adventures fail.
Crash, July 84
But it's not just the size of the game it's the quality as well that is astonishing ... ... scenes to fire the imagination.
PCG, April 84
As in all Level 9's adventures, the real pleasure comes not from scoring points but in exploring the world in which the game is set and learning about its denizens.
Which Micro?, February 84
I thoroughly recommend these Adventures, they are excellent value for money. No self-respecting Adventure-addict should be without them. I believe Level 9 are producing a series of Adventures which should be regarded as classics.
Atari User, July 84
These programs run very fast and there are no frustrating pauses. Level 9 Adventures are superbly designed and programmed, the contents first rate. The implementation of Colossal Adventure is nothing short of brilliance; rush out and buy it. While you're at it, buy their others too. Simply smashing!
Your 64, June 84
Level 9 – arguably the producer of the best adventure games in the UK – has done it again. LORDS OF TIME is a sparkling addition to its stable of winners.
Acorn User, July 84
(SNOWBALL). This is another imaginative, massive-scaled immensely enjoyable adventure from those experts down at Level 9 Computing.
Your Computer, March 84
ptember 83
Adventure Quest
Level 9 Computing
Adventure Quest is the second in Level 9's acclaimed Middle Earth trilogy, though it can be played by itself.
Available from W H Smith and good computer shops everywhere. If your local dealer doesn't stock Level 9 adventures yet, get him to contact us or: Centresoft, Microdealer UK, Ferranti & Craig, Leisuresoft, Lime Tree, LVL, PCS, R & R or Wonderbridge.
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SUNSHINE

ADVENTURES ● WAR GAMES ● SIMULATIONS



## EDITORIAL

WHAT MAKES A good adventure game? Ask any hardened adventurer and they will talk about the importance of atmosphere, attention to detail, the need for an original scenario, the use of graphics, the absence of graphics and text compression.

However, one factor which may not spring immediately to mind is logic. Adventures are built around a series of puzzles, the solutions to which are more or less complex. Much of the fun of playing adventures lies in the sudden realisation that a seemingly impenetrable problem actually has a deviously related answer. By the same token, much of the frustration in playing adventures comes from the discovery that the solution to a particular puzzle has no logical connection to it at all.

Suppose, for example, that you come across a vampire during the course of an adventure. The simplest, though not particularly inspired, solution would be to drive a wooden stake through the vampire's heart. To make it more difficult, the stake might be concealed elsewhere in the adventure. Alternatively, you might have to wait for dawn, wear garlic or use some holy water.

A more devious solution would be to make the stake unrecognisable in its present form. Thus, you might have to find a wooden fence and make the logical leap required to realise that a fence can be broken down into individual staves, each of which can function as a stake. Equally, you could be required to find a wooden table and an axe, chop a leg off the table and sharpen it to form a stake. Both solutions are trickier than just finding a wooden stake, but are logically related to the problem of removing the vampire.

An even trickier solution would be to make the vampire friendly and necessary to the completion of a puzzle later on. Then you might be required to find a blood bank in order to keep the vampire alive, rather than killing it.

But, if the solution to a puzzle has no connection with it whatsoever, except that the programmer decided that that was what the solution would be, there is a gnawing sense of pointlessness when the problem is finally solved.

# LETTERS

**Send your hints, successes, complaints and compliments to Letters Page, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD**

## Midnight's secrets

I HAVE recently purchased *Lords of Midnight* and must say that this is a game no Spectrum owner should be without. It is brilliant!

As I have (to date) completed the quest three times and the military victory once, I would be more than happy to offer help to anyone still struggling. (I must be honest, however, and admit that when my armies conquered Ushgarak, Doomdark had already taken Xajorkith and Morkin was safely tucked away in the Citadel of Gloom with the Ice Crown!). Fans of the game may be interested to know that I had so many armies I couldn't put them all into battle. I took the Citadel in one night losing less than 10 men, *and* there were about 12,000 Foul either on the Citadel or immediately adjacent to it. (It certainly helps to seize the Ice Crown before attempting to capture Ushgarak!)

Finally, a special message for Phil McDonald (article on p.8 September). Phil — your statement that Morkin cannot be safely accompanied by an army on his quest to locate the Ice Crown is rather misleading. You will probably have discovered that Morkin can only recruit certain characters — i.e, **those which will be of benefit to him on his journey.** The Lord of Shadows, who is within one day's travelling of the Tower of the Moon, can be recruited by Morkin, and can be very useful to him by going ahead and "clearing the way" of dragons, wolves, skulkrin and the like. Certainly, this particular Lord is of no use on the battlefield — safely ensconced in a keep he can usually manage to kill a few hundred of Doomdark's men and lose perhaps half his own army of 1000 warriors, but out on the plains he is absolutely hopeless and usually loses the lot, himself included! Even Farflame the Dragonlord can do better — when utterly invigorated he can kill 400 in one go! It is not impossible to complete the adventure without recruiting Shadows (I have done it) but it is much easier with him around, at least until Morkin reaches Farflame.

*Julie E Lewis*
*88 Western Road*
*Goole*
*Yorkshire*
*DN14 6RD*

## Thanks

I am writing to thank everyone who phoned or wrote to me offering help on *Snowball* and *Espionage Island*.

*James Jennett*
*Widnes*
*Cheshire*

## Helpful

WE WOULD be pleased to help on any of the following adventures: *Snowball*, *Colossal*, *Adventure Quest*, and *Lords of Time*, by Level 9; *Golden Baton*, *Wizard of Akyrz*, and *Time Machine* by Channel 8; Melbourne House's *The Hobbit*.

We have completed *The Hobbit* on the Commodore 64, and think that it is very boring. If the graphics were taken away, it would be a complete waste of £14.

If you want a reply to an enquiry, remember to send an SAE.

*M Jervis and C Barber*
*4 Ainsdale Close*
*Penketh*
*Cheshire*

## Arrays game

CONGRATULATIONS are due to Stephen Robinson, for his article on numeric arrays (*Micro Adventurer* August). An excellent piece, and very instructive.

I would take issue on a couple of points, though.

Firstly, line 50 in the program is superfluous. When an array is dimensional, all its values are automatically set to zero — there is no need for the for/next loop.

Second, it states in the article that vast areas of memory can be saved using this method. I'm not so sure. I converted a game I'd written, *Lethos*, from standard flags to a number array, and had to delete three pages of introduction and nine link locations. It seemed to me that the array used more memory, not less.

*Dave Watson*
*Westhoughton*
*Lancs*

BUS STOP

*"Don't you think you're getting just a bit too involved with your adventure software?"*

## PBM query

WHILE LOOKING through my January issue of *Micro Adventurer* I saw an article on "play-by-mail" games. This type of game interested me, so I suggested it to my friends, and we decided to form a syndicate to play them. When I reread the article I could find no mention of the addresses to write to, to join these games. I would be grateful if you could send me an address for the following games.

*Starlord*
*Vorcon Wars*
*Keys of Bled*

*Graham Giller*
*6 King's Newnham Road*
*Church Lawford*
*Nr. Rugby*

**The addresses are:**
***Starlord* 1 Rake Hey Close, Moreton, Wirral, L46 6EW**
***Vorcon* 59 Juniper, Birch Hill, Bracknell, Berks, RG12 4ZG**
***Bled* 95 King Street, Ramsgate, Kent**
**We will be featuring more on PBM gaming in later issues**

## Purchase problems

COULD you tell me if *Micro Adventurer* is still being published? Since obtaining one in March, I have been unable to find further issues in this area. I wondered if it had been discontinued.

*V E Spokes*
*Ambleside*
*Cumbria*

**ANYONE who has problems getting hold of *Micro Adventurer* can always take out a subscription. Alternatively, pester your local newsagent.**


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# £25,000 prize to be won

FORGET about video recorders, or Golden Sundials; now you can win enough to retire on — for a couple of years at least. The prize awaiting the first person to solve *Eureka*, a new adventure game, is no less than £25,000.

*Eureka* is a multi part adventure game with arcade interludes, devised by two former advertising executives, Mark Strachan and Dominic Wheatley (the grandson of thriller writer Denis Wheatley).

The games have been written by Ian Livingstone, of *Fighting Fantasy* game-book fame, and are set in five different time zones. Players will have to fight dinosaurs, Roman gladiators, evil knights, Nazis, and an egomaniac bent on world domination.

The programs run to 250K, and have been written by Andromeda Software's Hungarian programmers. *Eureka* apparently took five man years to create.

Throughout the text and graphic adventure are scattered clues which, when decoded, will give a secret phone number. The first person to rin that number will win the £25,000 prize.

Eureka will be for the CBM 64 and the Spectrum 48K, at £15.50. It will be released on October 31, worldwide.



*Artwork from the Eureka handbook which will contain additional clues to the mystery*

# Tir Na Nog

THE AFTERWORLD is becoming rapidly overpopulated with computerised characters. The latest addition is from Gargoyle Games, and is called *Tir Na Nog*, after the Celtic equivalent of Valhalla.

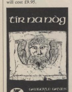
The game follows the hero Cuchulainn, as he searches Tir Na Nog, which means the Land of Youth, for the pieces of the Seal of Calum.

Described as a "vast interactive adventure," the game is all graphics.

The player can look in any one of four directions, and will see a coherent landscape. When the main character moves, the landscape scrolls.

Also in the game are independent semi intelligent adversaries, out to stop the player achieving his end.

Due for release in the first week of October, *Tir Na Nog* is for the 48K Spectrum and will cost £9.95.




# Macbeth's adventure

CREATIVE SPARKS, the software arm of Thorn EMI, are to launch an adventure game based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The game will be in four parts, all with text and graphics. *Macbeth* will be available for the Commodore 64, and will cost £14.95.

Creative Sparks will also be producing an adventure game based on Dangermouse, the popular cartoon character. Called *Danger Mouse and the Black Forest Chateau*, it will be launched alongside *Danger Mouse in Double Trouble*, an arcade game.

*Danger Mouse and the Black Forest Chateau* has been designed for children of eight upwards, and will feature some quite complex problems. Gordon Reid, Creative Sparks product manager, believes that "kids will probably need some parental help, as the game is designed as a learning process." It will be menu driven, to avoid the need for typing skills.



*Macbeth*

*Danger Mouse and the Black Forest Chateau* will be for the Spectrum at £6.95, and the Commodore 64 at £7.95.

Plans for next year include a series of adventure games featuring the exploits of a hero called Naylan Grant. Each will be set in a different era. Grant is the victim of manipulation by powerful superbeings, and must complete tasks in various time zones before being released.

According to Gordon Reid, the programs will feature computer controlled competitors with sophisticated artificial intelligence, as in *Valhalla*. The first in the series should be ready some time in April.

## Catacombs

ANIROG is releasing *Catacombs*, a text and graphic adventure for the Commodore 64, in September.

The game will feature animated graphics, and has around 50 locations. Programmer Marian Clark has deliberately made it non-sexist: you have the choice of playing as Duke the Fighter, or as Oswitch the Witch.

The game will also have a specially written musical score to accompany the graphics.

*Catacombs* will cost £7.95.

# To sleep, perchance to dream

STAR DREAMS, based in Seaford, near Brighton, is to release an adventure called *The Sandman Cometh*. It has a rather different plot line — the player is a dreamer, and the adventure is the dream.

Justin Middleton, Star Dreams' computer graphics designer, says that the group "thought of all the dream clichés we could, so you find corridors lined with doors, fairgrounds, Dracula — we even have a software review section." There is no dying in the game — you wake up instead.

THE SANDMAN COMETH
A DREAM OF AN ADVENTURE !
FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM48K

The game features text and graphics, and runs as two 48K programs for the Spectrum at £10.95






# Holmes micro

SHERLOCK HOLMES, from Melbourne House, is programmer Philip Mitchell's follow up to *The Hobbit*. It should do for Conan Doyle what its illustrious predecessor did for the works of J R R Tolkien.

*Sherlock* understands complex sentences, and features a similar cast of semi-intelligent characters as appear in *The Hobbit*, with Watson taking Thorin's place as the player's travelling companion.

The game will be launched in mid September on the Spectrum 48K at £14.95. A Commodore 64 version is planned.

The game's afoot, Watson — take precautions!

# Peter Pan

PETER PAN and the Lost Boys seem to have left Never Never Land and taken up residence in the 48K Spectrum, or so a publisher would have us believe.

Hodder & Stoughton launched *Peter Pan, the Adventure Game*, on September 6. The player faces the challenges that Peter Pan did — pirates, indians, and wild beasts. Hodder & Stoughton, who publish J. M. Barrie's original Peter Pan, say that a royalty on the adventure game, as on the Peter Pan books, will go to the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street.

# Pilgrim's Progress

THE SCRIPTURE Union has released an adventure game based on John Bunyan's classic tale of the Christian soul struggling towards salvation, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

James Day, who devised and coded the program, sees it as a response to programs which are "overstepping the limit". He says "I'm not running down the Hobbit, or games like that, I've had a lot of fun from them."

*Pilgrim's Progress* will be for the Spectrum 48K, and will cost £10.95. Prospective pilgrims will not need a copy of Bunyan's book, but a Bible is necessary.

# Games Day '84

GAMES DAY '84, the largest games convention in Britain was held in London on September 1/2.

Sponsored by Games Workshop, it was well supported by the hobby trade and by the games playing (and paying) public, although in smaller numbers than previous years. While software was sparse, there was much else of interest.

New role playing games previewed included *Judge Dredd*, *Dr Who*, and *Golden Heros*, a superhero RPG, all from Games Workshop. TSR were showing *Indiana Jones*, their RPG based on the Spielberg/Lucas box office smash. Avalon Hill UK had two copies of the new *Runequest 3*.

On the play by mail front, KJC Games were signing up players for *Earthwood* and *Crasimoff's World*, while Mitre Games were selling their new introductory boxed sets of *Tribes of Crane* and *Starmaster*.

Real life role playing was represented by *Treasure Trap*, and *Killer Kastle* — members of the former were taking on all comers in the arena at mock combat.

Both Hutchinson and Penguin had stands, and were selling their game books.

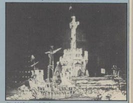
In stark contrast to other Games Days, there were no organised computer games section, although a number of micros were to be spotted around the hall.

Triffid Software launched the first in the *Runemagic* series for the BBC. The program includes a character generator, and a text only adventure. Triffid plan to include graphics on adventures number two to eight. Price is £6.95, and Electron, Spectrum, and Commodore 64 versions are promised.

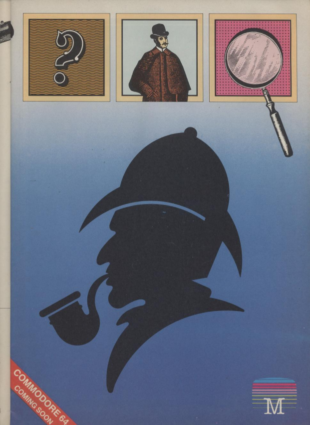
Also on display were Games Workshop's own software packages, announced in the MAD news section last, month. Since then, *Argent Warrior* has been renamed *Tower of Despair*.

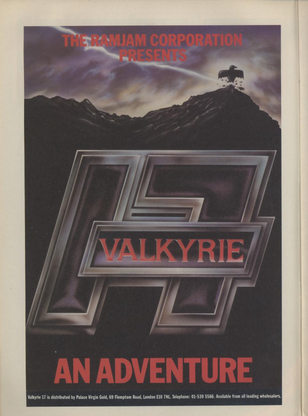
There were literally dozens of participation and competition games being run, ranging from *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* to *Victorian Role Playing*.

In the Games Day '84 Awards, *The Hobbit* was voted best Computer Game, with *Valhalla* second. Best Software Manufacturer was Ultimate, followed by Acornsoft.



*Citadel Miniatures' display*


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# First adventure

***Robert Kingsley** looks at a golden oldie.*

IN LATE 1977 I was a new student at Essex University, reading Computer Science. This was a time before the dawn of the personal computer era, when the only people with their own computers were those electronic wizards who had home-built machines. Computer games, therefore, were very much a minority sport, being limited to small numbers of people in and around the computing departments of universities and polytechnics.

Early on, I discovered the existence of the University of Essex Computer Society, a "hackers association" which was granted semi-official access to the University's DEC system 10 computer by the University authorities. This was in complete contrast to the policy of the academic institution I had attended previously (a campus university somewhere in the Midlands) where all non-academic use of computer time had been regarded very suspiciously.

My only previous experience of a computer game had been the original BASIC version of *Star Trek*, so I asked one of the experienced hackers whether this was available. "Yes, we've got that, but nobody uses it any more. We've something **much** better. Have you ever heard of *Advent?*" he replied.

## Original

In the unlikely event that anyone reading *Micro Adventurer* has never heard of it, *Advent* was, and is, the very first computer rôle-playing fantasy game. It is the original from which all others derive. Inside the computer industry the *Advent* program was already well known in the days when Commodore was just a calculator company, and Sinclair made matchbox sized radios. When Data General developed their rival to DEC's VAX supermini computer the *Advent* program was used as one of the tests that the design was working properly. (See *The Soul of a New Machine* by Tracy Kidder, Penguin pp. 82-84, for details.)

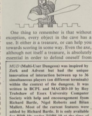
In the light of later developments, (*Zork* and *Mud* for example) *Advent* appears just a little old fashioned to the sophisticated games player of today, mainly because of the fact that it only has a two word command parser (a limitation that a lot of modern micro adventures still have), but I find I retain a certain attachment to it, even after having solved all the puzzles and winning the very last point (which Roy Trubshaw and I managed together sometime in 1978). This is probably due to the clever and witty style of the program.

The version I encountered in 1977 was the work of Don Woods of Stanford University [Don@SU-AI] from an original program by Willie Crowther. This is the 'standard' version. Other people have produced programs which more or less conform to the original, although presumably the "story-line" of the game is copyright to Don Woods. There is a maximum score of 350 points in the 'standard', in case you want to compare it with your version.

Around 1979–80 the Essex University Computing Centre obtained a copy of a much larger version with many more rooms and a total of 550 points. This was also written by Don Woods, and was every bit as good as the original, but unfortunately has an unchanged end-game. It had the addition of an ogre, a basilisk, a singing sword, a magic mushroom (honestly!) and other interesting features. I haven't heard of this 'Version 2' in a personal computer incarnation yet, but I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has.

Since the early days *Advent*uring, the program has become very popular with a large number of personal computer owners, with several versions of the game available for home computers. This was made possible by the rapid fall in the price of MOS memory and the consequent rise in the memory capacity of the average home micro. It is now more generally known as *Adventure*, as computer operating systems tend not to have the limitation on the length of program names which older mainframes did.

If you are playing the game at the moment, then I must warn you that there are one or two hints to be found in the rest of this article. I have tried hard to avoid spoiling the fun of the game, by giving away the answers to the puzzles (after all, the enjoyment to be had from the game is mainly in puzzle solving) but you have been warned.



One thing to remember is that without exception, every object in the cave has a use. It either *is* a treasure, or can help you towards scoring in some way. Even the axe, although not itself a treasure, is absolutely essential in order to defend oneself from the marauding dwarves. It is, I suppose, a measure of the complexity of a game, if it contains useless, red-herring and even positively dangerous objects.

In **Advent** everything is useful.

Something similar can also be said about the denizens of *Colossal Cave. Animals*, such as the bird and the bear, can be helpful, though they have no will of their own and have to be directed, but inhabitants of the cave (who can be recognised by the fact that they move around of their own free will) are always hostile. There are vindictive dwarves, a grasping troll, and a thieving pirate, none of whom will offer you any assistance whatsoever, although you can profit from the poor aim of the first dwarf (indeed it is most unwise not to). The pirate, who is really a dwarf with delusions, causes no actual harm, but is a confounded nuisance.

## Offbeat

It is really odd, that no matter how insoluble a puzzle may *appear* it *is* possible to solve all the puzzles in the cave if you think long and hard enough about them. Lateral thinking is important, as is a slightly offbeat sense of humour (try feeding the bird, to see what I mean). Some knowledge of traditional fantasy and fairy tales is useful. There are two mazes to be solved, one of twisty little passages all alike, and one of little twisty passages all different. One of these mazes is, in fact, extremely easy to solve, and one is of normal difficulty. The pirate hides his treasure chest somewhere deep inside one of them, along with any treasures he has stolen from you. At the centre of the other maze is a vending machine which can supply fresh batteries (at a price) for your lamp, if it is running out. Life not being easy, you will find the treasure in the difficult maze, which has to be mapped using traditional methods.

In my view, the hardest puzzle of all is the mystery of the last point. After having found all the treasures and solved the end-game we found that we still had only scored 349 out of the maximum 350 points. For weeks we believed that the final point was mythical, but we refused to give up, trying combinations of the most peculiar sort. In the end, we discovered that final point, and learned in the process that even dwarvish construction workers like to read!

In conclusion, it must be said, that *Advent*, the game which started it all off, is a very enjoyable and challenging adventure, even by todays standards, which no serious games player should miss. □

***MUD* (Multi-User Dungeon) was inspired by Zork and Advent but had the unique innovation of interaction between up to 36 simultaneous players (on different terminals) within the context of the dungeon. It was written in BCPL and MACRO-10 by Roy Trubshaw of Essex University Computer Society with help and encouragement from Richard Bartle, Nigel Roberts and Brian Mallett. Most of the current features were added by Richard Bartle. It is only available for PDP-10s under TOPS-10 at the time of writing.**

***ZORK* was created at the Programming Technology division of the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science by Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Bruce Daniels, and Dave Lebling. It was inspired by the Adventure program of Crowther and Woods, and the Dungeons and Dragons game of Gygax and Arneson, and was written in MDL. A FORTRAN-IV version was done by "an anonymous DEC engineer" which is known as *Dungeon*, and is available for PDP-11s and VAXen from DECUS. (Digital Equipment Computer User's Society.)**

# A Snowball's chance in deepest space

*Galactic agent **Ken Matthews** tackles murderous robots, the perils of cold sleep, and a crazed saboteur in Level 9's epic Snowball*

I SCREAM aloud and thrash wildly as I awake to find myself in a padded coffin with no apparent exit. Fortunately, my frantic movements nudge a previously unseen lever, the coffin opens and light floods in.

Reason penetrates my sleep numbed brain and I realise that I'm aboard the colony ship Snowball 9 bound for the new world of Eridani A. The fact that I'm alone means that something is terribly wrong — the 1.8 million passengers sleep on.

The above is my interpretation of the opening moves of Pete Austin's epic *Snowball*, a well structured, all-text adventure set in the twenty third century and based, in part, on Larry Niven's novel *The Mote in God's Eye*. Unlike most, the adventure loses nothing from its lack of graphics since, like Infocom games, descriptions are very thorough and allow full scope to the player's own imagination.

You take the part of Kim Kimberley, a secret agent, placed aboard without the crew's knowledge to take over in an emergency, which is, of course, just what's happened. Armed, initially, with only an elegant backless hospital gown you must divert the ship from its collision course with the alien sun of the new Eden.

The background for the adventure is covered extremely well in the twelve page booklet accompanying the game and a description of the Snowball itself means that you can have at least some idea of where to go from the start. Basically the Snowball consists of ten vast, rotating 'freezer discs', each containing 180,000 sleeping colonists. These discs are enclosed in a vast shell of ammonia ice, to both protect the passengers and serve as fuel for the giant fusion engines. Freezer control and other services are mounted on the outer surface of the shell. This huge ecosystem is attached to the motor unit and control room by a vast cable network called the 'Web' which incorporates 'Jacob's Ladder', a system to allow transport of personnel and fuel to the motor unit.




For the adventurer, the first challenge is to escape from the mortuary levels. You soon realise the freezer systems have detected your early awakening and have despatched the robot Nightingales to put you back to sleep — permanently! To aid your escape, and for later, it is useful to crack the colour code of the indicator lights scattered about the mortuary levels — electronics enthusiasts should have little trouble.

Several lives later, you will elude the syringe-wielding Nightingales and collapse breathlessly into an elevator on the floor above. From here, it is easy to find your way to the sealed off Freezer Control, hopefully clutching your trusty, airtight toolbox. As you wander around you will find two usable exits, the first leading to a massage parlour (maybe, after all that sleep, a quick rub down might be invigorating!) and the other to open space which, without a space suit, is inevitably fatal. The only one who seems to know where he's going is the scruffy little cleaning droid . . .

Now at the centre of things in Freezer Control the mystery unfolds with the discovery of the dead body of a ship's officer. Still, every cloud etc. and you find yourself a few useful items the richer. You're sure the screen would provide some useful clues if only you can get the blinking thing to work after looking at it for ages! Exploring the living quarters makes you even better equipped to continue your mission. The library finally points out your next step and adds to your battery of equipment. Lentil custard might seem rather useless now but would have been welcome when you'd just woken up.

Pretty soon you return to this area, codes and Nightingales hopefully dispensed with to deal with more of the electronic denizens of this floating world. Two problems face you at this stage in the form of one ailing droid and several bureaucratic ones each needing to be satisfied in its own way. You can play with the paper-pushers all you like but the damaged droid has only a short



time to go! Still, at least now you're equipped to go outside.

Once on the outside you soon find yourself climbing round on the seemingly endless web of cables connecting the Snowball to its drive unit. The suit air is limited and you'd best make a positive move quite quickly. A certain step in the right direction leaves you floating in space and approaching the ice field at fatal speed — any hint given here would be a shot in the dark!

You next encounter the monorail system which provides simple access to several useful locations such as the Habidome, Robodome, Warehouse and the route to the motor unit/control room. Getting to these locations and the items they contain will be no problem to the, by now, experienced Kim Kimberley but two major challenges present themselves in the form of a broken down Snowdozer that must be repaired and sent on its way, and a deadly waldroid (controlled remotely by the saboteur) which prevents your access to Jacob's Ladder. Assembling the items to repair the Snowdozer is quite straightforward, providing you've discovered how to replenish your air supply, but the waldroid must be disabled and this is no mean task — if you can crack this one you'll be painting the town tonight.

Eventually though you will reach the top of the ladder and find the base of the drive unit/control room. Here you encounter the villain's second line of defence which, while not a patch on the first, still requires a purrfect solution to get you past it.

At last! You've reached the control area but don't get carried away — a little caution will prevent a real roasting from a hidden laser. You must reflect carefully before making your next move.

The final problem faces you! A crazed, armed saboteur when you'd expected a fanfare or similar accolade! Still forewarned is forearmed and in a quick flurry of moves the Snowball is safe.

The above is not a solution but one of several scenarios that might apply during the playing of *Snowball* and hopefully gives some idea of the drama that builds up during a game session — part of what makes Level 9 games interesting and absorbing. It really is easy to imagine your role as the main character in a novel. The storyline presented above gives only a suggestion of the possibilities open to the player and a few hints to the more abstract problems. A huge amount of descriptive narrative has been omitted, together with the location of almost all items and the simpler problems that need to be solved to obtain them, to allow you, the player, to discover for yourself the intriguing worlds of Level 9.

If you are new to Level 9 adventures you will find that careful mapping and examination of ALL items will pay dividends. Use of items is made easy by the extended vocabulary of over 200 words and the program's ability to search a complicated command sentence and guess at your meaning. This alone makes *Snowball* worth playing when compared to other adventures where hours that could be spent problem solving are wasted in a frustrated search to find a command the program understands. This command analyser is a refreshing improvement over Level 9's Middle Earth Trilogy — *Dungeon Adventure* didn't understand 'GET'!

Every item in *Snowball* can be used, but some needn't be, and although points are scored and lost, there are no treasures to collect, only your mission to complete — believe me, that's enough!

The game itself comes attractively and sturdily packed to be Post Office proof. The accompanying booklet contains a first class introduction to the adventure and boasts artwork usually reserved for the better role playing games. It is well produced, comprehensive and free of typographical errors — which is not true of the spelling in the game itself. My copy loaded first time but is backed up on side two just in case. Also included is a voucher entitling the buyer to a free clue, but I'm told you now receive a complete hint sheet in return for your sae — not that you'll need it given this review and Tony Bridge.

In summary, I believe that Level 9 adventures leave Scott Adams and others far behind and are matched in concept, design and implementation only by Infocom and to some extent Melbourne House. Before you all write in in praise of Scott et al, this is not intended as a criticism — indeed I was weaned on Adventures 1-12 — but as a suggestion that the adventure game has evolved to allow more interaction between us and the programs we love. Level 9 certainly seem to be the British leaders in this field.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Adventure** | : *Snowball* |
| **Micro** | : *BBC, CBM64, Spectrum plus others* |
| **Format** | : *Cassette* |
| **Price** | : *£9.90* |
| **Supplier** | : *Level 9* |

# Acornsoft's master sorcerer

***Martin Croft** meets Peter Killworth, the author of Philosopher's Quest and other highly acclaimed adventures for Acornsoft*

PETER KILLWORTH'S CV is impressive — but incomplete. Nowhere in his six page list of publications does Peter, Associate Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and an academic of long standing, mention the titles which brought him two thirds of his income last year.

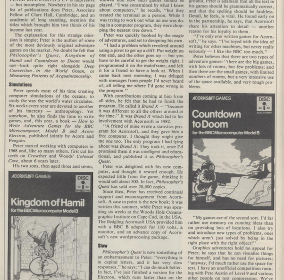
The explanation for this strange omission is simple; Peter is the author of some of the most deviously original adventure games on the market. No doubt he felt that *Philosopher's Quest*, *Kingdom of Hamil* and *Countdown to Doom* would not look quite right alongside *Deep Convection in the World Ocean*, or *Measuring Patterns of Acquaintanceship*.

### Simulations

Peter spends most of his time creating computer simulations of the oceans, to study the way the world's water circulates. Six weeks every year are devoted to another of his interests — anthropology. Yet somehow, he also finds the time to write games, and, this year, a book — *How to Write Adventure Games for the BBC Microcomputer, Model B and Acorn Electron*, published jointly by Acorn and Penguin.

Peter started working with computers in 1968 and, like so many others, first cut his teeth on Crowther and Woods' *Colossal Cave*, about 6 years later.

His two sons, then aged three and seven, showed him how such games should be played. "I was constrained by what I knew about computers," he recalls, "but they treated the terminal as a person. While I was trying to work out what an axe was doing in a computer program, they were chopping the nearest tree down."




Peter was quickly hooked by the magic of adventures, and set to designing his own.

"I had a problem which revolved around using a pivot to get up a cliff. Put weight on one end, and the other goes up — but you have to be careful to get the weight right. I programmed it on the mainframe, and left it for a friend to have a look at. When I came back next morning, I was deluged with messages from people I'd never heard of, all telling me where I'd gone wrong in the program."

With contributions coming at him from all sides, he felt that he had to finish the program. He called it *Brand X* — "because it was different to all the others around at the time." It was *Brand X* which led to his involvement with Acornsoft in 1982.

"A friend of mine wrote a statistics program for Acornsoft, and they gave him a free computer. I thought they might give me one too. The only program I had lying about was *Brand X*. They took it, once I'd promised them it was intelligent and educational, and published it as *Philosopher's Quest*.

Peter was delighted with his new computer, and thought it reward enough. He expected little from the game, thinking it would sell about 500. In fact, *Philosopher's Quest* has sold over 20,000 copies.

Since then, Peter has received continual support and encouragement from Acornsoft. A case in point is the new book; it was written this summer, while Peter was spending six weeks at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute on Cape Cod, in the USA. The fledgling Acornsoft USA provided him with a BBC B adapted for 110 volts, a monitor, and an advance copy of Acornsoft's new wordprocessing package.

### Slow

*Philosopher's Quest* is now something of an embarrassment to Peter: "everything is in capital letters, and it has very slow responses," he says; "I can do much better. In fact, I've just finished a version for the Electron, which runs faster than on the BBC. I'll be reworking the original next."

Perhaps because of his academic background, Peter is adamant that all the text in his games should be grammatically correct, and that the spelling should be faultless. Detail, he feels, is vital. He found early on in the partnership, he says, that Acornsoft share his attention to detail — another reason for his loyalty to them.

"I've only ever written games for Acornsoft," he says. "I've toyed with the idea of writing for other machines, but never really seriously — I like the BBC too much."

Peter believes that there are two types of adventure games: "there are the big games, with lots of rooms, but few problems; and then there are the small games, with limited numbers of rooms, but a very intensive use of the space available, and very tough problems.

"My games are of the second sort. I'd far rather use memory on cunning ideas than on providing lots of locations. I also try and introduce new types of problems, ones which aren't just solved by being in the right place with the right object!"

Graphics adventures hold no appeal for Peter; he says that he can visualise things for himself, and has no need for pictures; "anyway, I'd much rather use the space for text. I have an unofficial competition running with Pete Austin of Level 9 and various other people on text compression. We've got it to about fifty per cent."

Surprisingly enough for such a compe-

tent programmer, he considers programming skill "irrelevant" in the design of a game. "It doesn't matter how well you can program," he believes, "if you haven't got a good enough plot, people won't buy or play the game."

**Quondam**

At present, Peter is hard at work on a number of projects. About to be published by Acornsoft is a game co-authored by him and Rod Underwood. Called *Quondam*, it is, according to Peter, "a very small land which contains totally original features." He is quick to add, "I can say this because I didn't write the original storyline."

Acornsoft has suffered severely at the hands of software pirates in the past, and so Peter was unable to say much about the game. He could say, however, that there are about 50 objects to be found. Only eight of these, though, can be carried at any one time; and to prevent players going back to collect "one over the eight" there is a series of one way gates. The main problem, then, is how to get the extra objects past the barriers, because they will be needed later in the game.

Another feature of the game is, according to Peter, "an extensive banking system with dreadful puns."

Another of Peter's projects at the moment relates to one of his hobbies. He is a magician, specialising in close up magic; strangely enough, so is Acornsoft's managing director, David Johnson-Davies. The two got together with Paul Daniels, and the result is a software package which enables a BBC to perform tricks.

Peter's next adventure game is likely to be located around a derelict spaceship. "I'm calling it *Celeste* at the moment. It's set in the far future, when mankind has evolved into lots of different sub-species. A spaceship is found, deserted except for a four fingered corpse. The challenge is to get into the security system of this alien craft, and find out who is responsible for the deaths of the crew.

*Peter Killworth — adventure writer extraordinaire*

*Celeste* is a good example of the way Peter writes his games. He spends some time just thinking about a particular idea, working it through in his mind. "I've been thinking about *Celeste* seriously for about a month now," he says, "and I'll probably keep on thinking about it for another two or three months."

After that, he will spend some three or four days getting the plot and related ideas down on paper. Then it takes four to six weeks to program, followed by two weeks testing — and then he gives it to somebody else to go over. "I like to throw it to someone and tell them to kill it."

Sometimes there are problems that require more time: "*Castle of Riddles* had to be written for a prize competition — the first person to solve it got £2000. It took me two weeks solid work to figure out how to protect the code word so that a hacker couldn't break in to the program."

Peter has no plans to desert the academic life — "I still feel that there is far too much challenge in research for me ever to give it up and write full time," he says.

# A feast for addicts

### Andy Mitchell reviews Peter Killworth's book

**Book** *How to Write Adventure Games* **Author** *Peter Killworth* **Micro** *BBC and Electron* **Price** *£5.95* **Publisher** *Penguin Acorn Computer Library*

IT'S AN old but true saying "writing Adventure games is more fun than playing them". It follows from this that books and tools used to develop your game can be more fun than games. If proof were needed of this truth this book supplies it.

The book is written by Peter Killworth who is the present chief sorcerer of Acornsoft with a string of great adventure games to his name. The object of the book is to enable a reader, who is fairly fluent in BBC Basic, to create and write fairly complicated adventures. The book uses three games to illustrate the ideas and techniques of the author: *Caves*, a game of exploration through a random network of caves in search of treasure, *Mini*, a simple four room adventure, and *Roman*, a complex adventure set in ancient Rome.

Before launching myself into a more detailed description of the book's contents I should first say a word on its style. In the first few paragraphs where the author reminisces on his first encounter with an adventure game, I found myself reliving the feeling of wonder and excitement that he, like me, experienced when those never to be forgotten words appeared:- "You are standing at the end of a long road. In front of you is a brick building. A stream flows out of the building and down into the valley. Around you is the forest". In describing his feelings as he wandered off down that road to the mysterious grating in the forest clearing through which countless thousands of us have also travelled, his skill of story telling shows why he has been so successful in his games and now in this book. I felt I was listening to a kindred spirit who has also been bewitched by the wonder and ▶

the fun of this fantastic genre. It is this feeling of fun and excitement which pervades the book and makes it enjoyable and easy reading throughout. If anything is going to move you to write your own game this is it.

Prior to embarking on the mundane matters of techniques and hints the author cautions us with his first rule of Adventure programming; "No matter how small an Adventure you write, it will take far, far more time and effort than you thought it would".

The book is split into eight parts, three of which design and create in simple steps the previously mentioned games. Complete listings of the code are supplied as is the listing for a further section containing a data generator program used to store the many items of data used by the game in an efficient, compacted form. Further sections explain the basic requirements of a game, the method of dovetailing the data into the main program, and a "shell" of a game which can be used as the basis of your own game.

Two appendices are provided which briefly explain bitwise logic and hexadecimal notation. The reader is treated sympathetically here and its all done with sugar on it to keep the nasty taste of work away—still, we must suffer for our art sometimes! At this point I should mention that thoughout the book

How To Write
ADVENTURE GAMES
for the BBC Microcomputer Model B
and Acorn Electron
Peter Killworth
PENGUIN ACORN COMPUTER LIBRARY

the author explains many techniques which I myself have used; he then goes on to explain why these are bad techniques and suggests better ones (Wince Wince!).

I found the level of programming expertise required to understand all that is offered meant that there was sufficient "meat" to enable me to pick up quite a few tips — in fact an embarrassingly large amount! For those whose abilities may be even shakier the author kindly invites you to skip some small sections — type in the procedure offered and "believe"!

The final section is perhaps the most important in that it is devoted to the discussion of plot creation. At the base of every good adventure is a good story line and reading how a master goes about it sheds some light into his devious mind and is good practise for developing your own plots. It was here that I enjoyed it most. Devising the puzzles and solutions to *Roman* is a lesson in how to anticipate and nudge the player along the path. As the author reminds us, having a suitable and usually amusing answer for the player's wrong move can be as much fun for the player as getting the right answer.

In short the book is a feast for addicts and I suspect I could spend many hours trying out the tips. The best feature however is its never failing enthusiasm which shines through the facts and makes the idea of writing your own game sound like fun. For this reason the book is a much better investment than most games and utilities. So for those of you who don't know how to, it's a good buy, and for those who, like me, think you already know how to, it may be an even better one!

**Andy Mitchell**

# Philosopher's problem

***Robin** and **Jean Burgess** look at some of the problems the adventurer faces in Philosopher's Quest, and give some hints on how to solve them*

NOW HOW might someone who bravely thought of themselves as a Philosopher start out on a journey of discovery and adventure? Where might he or she expect to be when suddenly launched into the fray? A dimly-lit cavern, perhaps, or somewhere else far from what passes as civilization? Not a bit of it. Far more subtle is our devious Adventure-Creator. We find ourselves standing in a small shop. What? Or as the program would say when it doesn't appreciate the clever wisdom of our erudite instructions:- "EH?" The description continues: "There are areas of the shop intended for the display of Treasure." (Ah! That's more like it!) "There is an exit South, above which hangs a sign, reading "Leave Treasure here. Please note that only TWO objects may be removed from this shop. So choose carefully!"

Oh! A problem straight away. (But what did we expect?)

The items that are lying in the shop are an Aqualung (perhaps there is some water in which to swim somewhere), a bunch of Keys (oh yes, they *must* be useful), a Cup of Tea (curiouser and curiouser, for we have been told in the instructions before we begin that *nothing* is a Red-herring) and a Steel Rod. And yes, we have counted correctly — that makes *four* objects! But we're only allowed to take two!

Giving away as little as possible, one possible action on your part results in the intriguing but intimidating retort:- "An enormous voice intones: 'VERY CLEVER! BUT YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH THAT AGAIN!' (And you won't, either. What is more, you face another problem the moment you leave the shop.)

Later on, you reach the Curly Passage and here you find a Ruby Amulet. Presumably you will pick it up, but you will find it is worth only *one* point! (This is out of a possible total of 250. Now the test of character: do we despair, or do we, as we are told all brave adventurers would, persevere? Do we have a choice?)

Before long we discover a way to produce:- "The sound of bells ringing out, and lights flashing," before "peace" returns (and very nice too). A lot friendlier than the Star Wars-type "garbage chute act" that might follow if we're not careful! But what do we make of the "device" that tips a lot of paint all over us? At the beginning of your explorations the program, seems to throw up far more problems than it solves!

Eventually you will reach the seaside, complete with cliffs, (probably still with only that one point!) where you discover one of no less than five differently-coloured stars, this a yellow one inscribed on the cliff-face. Yet another puzzle that remains obscure to the end. Here it is no holiday-resort, unfortunately, but there is an apparently irrelevant piece of jetsam (or is it flotsam?) lying nearby and a curious Buzzing noise over the sea in the distance to think about.

## South of the pink star

South of the Pink Star is a diminutive cuddly bundle of fun, well-known for its partiality to a certain kind of dairy product. The said product, or at least a "very smelly piece" of such is available elsewhere, but the procuring of this ultra-obnoxious item

and its transportation provide the intrepid Philosopher with ample scope for ingenuity. (We can still vividly picture the assault on our senses!)

There are several other creatures to be found on your travels too. It does seem exceedingly unfair that trying to find a dog in the room where there is a "large apparently-empty kennel, fastened to the floor" produces nothing but frustration. In addition, having discovered this room, you immediately have another problem, because none of the ten possible directions (8 points of the compass plus Up and Down) enable you to leave the room again!

Speaking of dogs, one day you may actually meet the dear old lady, at "Shangri-La". (Yes, we said "dogs"!) Just like some people we all know well she has the habit of sending you on difficult, but apparently imperative errands, *provided* you have accomplished each previous errand. In addition she seems to want to keep you always at arm's length.

## Large empty kennel

Above all, you must ensure she doesn't "pop her clogs" prematurely. If you manage that you will find that in the end (and that end takes a great deal of time, patience and thoughtfulness to achieve), she proves to have a heart of gold. (Not literally, you greedy pseudo-philosopher!) Incidentally, the first thing the old lady wants from her visitor is a nice Cup of Tea. (You remember that was in the shop, don't you? — Sorry, we're just trying to make your decisions more difficult!)

There are several locations where exits can be found in *many* different directions, all of which need to be investigated sooner or later. One of these is referred to as being rather like Piccadilly Circus, where we are told one of the Exits leads down a slippery slide. In addition we learn tantalisingly that in the roof there is a slide entering from above, "but you can't reach it!" And what might be the function of the Empty Bottle you find here? Fill with water? — but we are categorically told that we, as truly ascetic Philosophers, may not eat or drink.

It is in the various exits leading away from "Piccadilly Circus" that some of your further escapades occur. We almost guarantee that you will personally meet your doom a minimum of eight times as a direct result of investigating these different exits fully. It is of considerable value to have the SAVE feature in the game! And though there are many different ways to terminate your travels the claim that every problem you face has a perfectly reasonable solution is accurate. Finding all the solutions is of course far from straightforward.

There is the Gloomy Area near Piccadilly Circus, for example, with only two exits, neither exactly inviting:- A Narrow Crawl in one direction and a Gate, protected by a Heavy Iron Portcullis, decorated with Human Bones, in the other. Charming! And believe it or not:- a Green Star floats above you!

One of the most difficult single rooms in the program to enter and exit successfully is clearly the cause for all the human bones. Indeed, it is referred to in the program as "The Danger Room". We leave you to experience this for yourself, if you can in fact work out how to get INTO it safely at all! Suffice to say that you have merely swords, spears, pits and other lethal items with which to contend.

Another interesting room is a certain passage where "Those Uncertain about Existence should venture No Further!" If you, being the ace Philosopher you hope yourself to be, do indeed plough on you come to a place where you CEASE TO EXIST! Perhaps you can philosophise your way out of this predicament, but another couple of perils will then immediately face you, one of which is the ubiquitous Giant Spider who inhabits all dark nether regions (and who just loves tasty bipeds.)

Sooner or later, as with all good Shaggy Dog stories, you will come upon someone like the Ancient Mariner, complete with Long Grey Beard and Glittering Eye. You are told further that he seems to have something tied round his neck. Upon investigating (and who can pass up such an opportunity?) the Old Mariner apprehends you with the said Eye before you can escape and begins "This Frightfully Interesting Story" about, you guessed it, an Albatross! Unfortunately while he drones on and on, your Lamp runs down. That's one problem, and you certainly need a lamp for your Adventuring. The other problem is that very soon you find a particularly heavy weight tied around your own neck!

Clearly no Adventure program would be complete without its Mazes. Here there are two examples. The first is of "Smooth Passages" where you have to find all the exits from each apparently identical location, and the second consists of something called the "M.E. Passages". (A tip here is that you can program the Function Keys to perform various common commands for you, and using *FX4,2 you can program the cursor and COPY keys too.)

A little digression about the M.E. Passages, as this is where we were really stuck, because the whole network seems to consist of irreversible slides. You can go Down (accompanied by:- WHEEE — OOF!! or similar!) but not Up. Nor, once you have gone so far, can you return to the point whence you begin. Our trouble started when we reached the place where we were told that "To the North lies a Slide Under Construction".

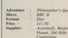
East, South and West led back to the same notice while every attempt to go North (by Jumping, Crawling. Flying or whatever) gave the inauspicious reply:- "WHEEE — CRACK! The Slide has Collapsed and you have broken every bone in your body. Would you like to try again?" We considered ourselves extremely versatile in our thinking, and reasoned thus: the sign says "Caution", and in a certain location can be found a Bronze Trophy labelled "Danger Man". Now M.E. could be pronounced "Emmy", as in the television awards, and there used to be a program on the television called "Danger Man". So perhaps if you held onto the Trophy and bravely leapt along the tunnel, you would succeed in passing the dangerous part of the Slide. Isn't that ingenious? But completely wrong! You'll have to puzzle out the solution for yourself.

When at last the time comes to go out to sea, you will find the journey can only be made once. You encounter in your travels, amongst other things, a "Sad-Looking Octopus", some "Wriggly red wet Passages" and several typical diving hazards. Each of these you will need to overcome by your ingenuity, though temporarily putting anything down to do so can unfortunately result in its loss ". . . into the Murk below".

## Sad looking octopus

You are told that if you manage to score above 200 points then you may consider yourself to be a philosopher. Eventually you may even finish the game in its entirety. It certainly has a large selection of different problems and challenges to be overcome, some of which appear only *after* you have circumvented some other puzzle. A text-only Adventure, the game should appeal to all those who like to pretend they are "thinkers".

May all your Philosophisings be happy ones!



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Adventure** | : | *Philosopher's Quest* |
| **Micro** | : | *BBC B* |
| **Format** | : | *Disc* |
| **Price** · | : | *£11.50* |
| **Supplier:** | : | *Acornsoft, Betjeman House, 104 Hills Road, Cambridge* |



# BECOME LONE WOLF...

... sole survivor of a devastating attack on the monastery of Kai.

A great cloud of black winged beasts has swept down and engulfed the monastery. All the Kai Lords, whose secret skills you were learning, have been killed.

Raising your face to the sky, you swear revenge on the Darklords of the West. But first, you must warn the King of the invasion, retrieve Sommerswerd and then use it to beat off the attackers. There are now two exciting LONE WOLF adventure games. Each one requires you to assume the mantle of Lone Wolf, make all his decisions for him, and actually fight his combats move by move. You really are Lone Wolf.

You are going on a journey, a quest. You create your own adventures, choose your own tactics and make your own decisions.

# You swear

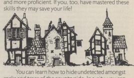
## THE LESSONS OF COMBAT AND ENDURANCE

When you were training with the Kai Lords, you acquired many secret skills and disciplines. Now, you may need to use them. You may need to improve some, and disregard others.

"Combat Skills" may be needed to defeat the enemies you encounter on your way to reaching the beleaguered King, and whilst saving your country. You will need "Endurance" to survive. Each decision you make can alter the course of your adventure. So choose wisely, for you will often be totally surprised by the effect your choice may have on your survival.

## THE SURVIVAL DISCIPLINES

Over the centuries, the Kai Lords had mastered the skills of the warrior. As you proceed through your adventure you may find that you are becoming more and more proficient. If you, too, have mastered these skills they may save your life!



You can learn how to hide undetected amongst rocks and trees of the countryside. In a city, you can look and sound like a native which may help you to find shelter.

Learn how to communicate with animals and move objects by sheer concentration alone.

You can develop a "Sixth Sense" that warns you of imminent danger. It may also reveal the true nature of a stranger.

"Tracking" may help you choose the right path and decipher prints or tracks of creatures in the wild.



The discipline of "Healing" can restore your "Endurance" after being wounded in combat.

## THE "COMBAT" SKILLS

When you entered the Kai monastery you were taught to fight with daggers, spears, warhammers, axes and swords.

The evil Darklords, though, have the ability to attack using "Mindforce". Lone Wolf can learn the discipline of "Mindshield" and also "Mindblast", the old Kai Lord's ability to fight using the forces of the mind alone. You, Lone Wolf, control the combat, you decide whether to fight or not, and you alone can manipulate the moves.

## THE EQUIPMENT TO SURVIVE

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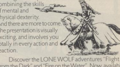
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# The Finger of Death

*This month, **Richard Bartle** looks at the most important character in MUD — the wiz*

*MUD's* multi-user capabilities set it aside from normal adventure games. There are many of these features, including communication, interaction by way of giving, stealing, kissing and the like, and of course the great favourite, killing your fellow players. These are reasonably direct consequences of having more than one person playing in the same world at the same time; the most significant development, however, is in an entirely different vein, although indirectly its success depends as much on the game being multi-user as something as obvious as FOLLOW or ASSIST does. I am referring to the concept of a wizard/witch.

## Wiz

Since "wizard/witch" is a bit of a mouthful, and since *MUD* players are too fastidious to tolerate the type mismatch involved in calling a male a witch or a female a wizard, the *MUD*speke term "wiz" has been coined to mean wizard/witch generically (or witch/wizard, you pedant!). Although using wizard/witch expands the size of this article, and hence means I get paid more, I'll stick to the friendlier term "wiz".

Last time, I told you that *MUD* has "levels" indicating a player's experience of the game, which depend on the number of points you've obtained for your deeds (similar to the *Dungeons and Dragons* system). This is so that people who know the game better can swank around as something like "Nero the Hero" instead of just plain "Nero". Also, your chances of getting spells to work increase on a level-by-level basis, and there are certain useful artifacts such as the amulet which you can't use until you're a sorcerer or whatever. The levels have to end somewhere, and the top of the tree is wiz. It's possible to make wiz in 4 or 5 games if you get absolutely ALL the treasure. Indeed, you can make it in only one game if you don't mind kicking the beggar 102,400 times. Once you've reached wiz, however, the game changes.

Well, perhaps it's not fair to say the game actually **changes**. It's still the same old *MUD*, it's just that once you're a wiz it takes on a new perspective. If *MUD* were an ordinary adventure, you could expect at this point some kind of "endgame", and that would be it, you put your cassette back in the box and rush out to buy (ha!) a new one. *MUD*, however, as I keep telling you, is not an ordinary adventure, and reaching wiz is where the fun **really** begins!

When you're a wiz, you have power. And I mean real power. You can do virtually anything. A forbidding array of commands lie at your fingertips. These are so virulent that it's a cinch to crash the game if you're not careful. Indeed, *MUD* even has a CRASH command for wizs in case they can't be bothered to, say, pick up the rain twice from different rooms and do an inventory (although that's more fun!). Once people make it to wiz, for the next couple of days the game crashes with monotonous regularity until they learn the ropes. Fortunately, one of the first commands they learn is how to reset the game so that they can unscrew all the problems they've caused!

Of course, in the commercial version of *MUD* this sort of thing would be toned down a bit, otherwise you'd get people from rival games companies making wiz and keeping your world in a perpetual state of imminent destruction. Since *MUD* has no competition as yet, though, this fragility is left unchecked to give the "mortals" (non-wiz's) a little more incentive to get those few elusive points that they need to reach the top.

## Snoop

Most commands will stay in any commercialised *MUD*, however. Some are powerful yet not dangerous, for example SNOOP. This enables you to see what is on the screen of any mortal you choose, exactly as it appears to them. In effect, everything *MUD* sends to their terminal is copied and sent to yours too (in addition to the stuff you'd normally get). Of course, you can't snoop on someone who is snooping on someone else, otherwise it's possible to get into a sort of feedback loop, which wouldn't do the game much good at all! SNOOP is one of the most popular wiz commands, and it's normal for wiz's to be snooping on a mortal full-time. The reason it's so good is that there's a certain wicked human fascination for watching other people making complete idiots out of themselves as they try to go about doing things completely the wrong way.

Other reasonably safe commands include the ability to pick up or drop objects anywhere you like without having to move there. Even if you did feel the need to make an appearance, you can materialise in places rather than take the normal walking sort of route which mortals are obliged to use. There are a few rooms, in fact, which it is **impossible** to reach except by teleporting there. These are the STORE, full of useful, spare items which you might want players to come across (like zombies, for example); HOME, the wiz room where you can sit and SNOOP on mortals without their ▶

SOME PLAYERS go to extraordinary lengths to get points. One made it to the top level of experience almost solely on the basis of what he learned by reading through log files of other players' games, which they had forgotten about and left conveniently easy to read on the shared disc. Another favourite ploy is to ask for innocent "hints" from various people about some particular problem in the game, stitch the answers together, and then go do it.

This was the strategy of one of our regular players until last night. The most vicious and ferocious creature in *MUD* is the dragon. It is not unknown for this monster to beat a party of 8 players who mount a mass attack at once. If you come across the dragon, you can reckon on a life expectancy of about 20 seconds unless you flee before it notices you. However, by probing and questioning, our hero managed to learn that there was some easier way to kill the dragon, and that a lump of coal was something to do with it. Linking this with a half-erased notice he'd seen, he managed to find out from an obliging colleague that if you feed the coal to the dragon, it dies.

Happily embarking on this quest, he courageously wrested the coal from the bunker full of rats where it is stored, braved the shark and the storms to get to the island where the dragon roams, came upon the beast and fed it the coal. Nothing happened. Perplexed, he was looking for someone to ask what to do when all of a sudden the monster smashed him into a pulp with one blow of its enormous claws!

Evidently, no-one had told him that it takes 30 minutes before the coal has any effect on the dragon . . .!

Oh well, it's only a game.


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PLAYERS may come and go in *MUD*, but the names of everyone who ever made wiz are preserved for posterity in *MUD*'s graveyard. Later players gaze on these epitaphs as they wend their weary way by (for the graveyard is also an easy maze), and hear some of the great names of the past. These are often in-jokes, for example "On a huge grave is the name, Evil the Wizard." means nothing until you've seen how fat the chap was! A similar sentiment can be applied to the description "You smell the grave of Conn the Wizard some way to one side." Some tombs outline the method by which the player made it to wiz, for example "The hastily-erected grave of Endora the Witch is said to stand here . . ." (she made it from scratch in 4 weeks — a record) and "The grave of Tremble the Wizard is here, made almost entirely of old logs." (he spent hours sifting through log files of other folks' games to find out how to do things!). The third type of headstone is the one ordered by the players themselves. Some go for the impressive ("Before you looms an obsidian vault, insculpt Shadow the Wizard."), but thankfully we're not all that egocentric. ("Inscribed on a modestly austere tombstone here is the name, Richard the Wizard.")!

◀ knowing you're in the game (since it is cloaked from their view); LIMBO, an exitless room which corresponds to a sort of "sin-bin", a place you take mortals who are annoying you to cool off, leaving them to languish until you deign to release them; and XMASBX, which contains all you need for a merry christmas, and which wizs distribute to players when they feel the seasonal urge to do a bit of goodwill to all mankind.

These abilities are reasonably harmless, as I said. Tormenting mortals by sitting around in HOME, SNOOPing on them and dropping strange objects in the rooms you think they're about to enter is the sort of fun thing wizs do all the time. Some of the things they can do are **not** harmless, though. Primary among these is the FOD. FOD stands for "Finger of Death", and what it does is more or less obvious from that! Once you're FODed you're "dead dead"; you lose all your points, your persona is destroyed, and you have to start from scratch again. Wizs mainly FOD each other, since they can come back straight away due to there being a password on wiz mode. Once you've made wiz, you just tell it the password and you're back to wiz again. Sometimes, though, if mortals really play up a lot and pester you despite your ominous warnings of the dark and mysterious things you're going to do to them, you might use your FOD on them as a last resort.

## Benign

Wizs, although all-powerful, are meant to be generally benign. Most of what is done to mortals is really just teasing them, and they are generally rewarded by a few points or some treasure once the wiz has finished their play. Mortals don't have much say in the matter, naturally, but are spurred on by the knowledge that when they're a wiz, they'll be able to dish out similar treatment to hapless, innocent victims!

There is an unwritten code of conduct which wizs follow, and which works because the wizs were once mortals themselves. Wizs know all too well what it's like to be summoned to a cold, dark room and left alone with the words "hehehe" ringing in your ears. They know the disappointment in forging through the swamp for half an hour only to find that someone has swapped the incredibly valuable crown in the centre for a fake one. They've felt the pangs of outrage when you've been attacked by a souped-up bunny rabbit which took you 15 minutes to kill. In short, they know when to stop.

*Simon Dally of Century Communications, who plays as Century the Wizard and Grendel the Mortal*

There are many more powers which wizs may call upon to make their life easier and cause mortals to fear them with fervent paranoia, some more of which I'll doubtless be mentioning in future articles. I'll also be introducing you to a few wizs who have achieved notoriety, and telling you some of the quaint tricks they get up to to give mortals the heeby-geebies. To finish with, though, I'd like to talk about the relevance of *MUD*'s wizs to Multi-User Dungeons in general.

Anyone can design a multi-user adventure and sell it. It will be a success whatever they do, but if there's one thing *MUD* has going for it, it is experience. A total exceeding 20,000 hours of play has been spent on *MUD*, and if any single point arises from that it's that wizs make the game. They rule it, they stamp their personalities on it, and they give mortals something to aim for, a goal, a purpose, something which explains why they're in there hacking and slaying. Without wizs, *MUD* would only be half the fun that it is with them (although still considerably more than single-user adventures!). If *MUD* does nothing else for multi-user adventure games (whenever they become generally available), for evolving the concept of a wiz it should always be remembered.□

THE RECORD for number of times FODded goes to ABUSE, who, as the name implies, used to come in as a novice and spend all his time (short though it was!) insulting people. After being FODded he'd start from scratch and do the same thing. Eventually he had to give up when people used to FOD him before he could open his mouth to say anything! MORAL: if you're going to insult people, make sure they're not wizs!

# Rendezvous between the stars

*An insufferable computer with a neat line in sarcasm helps* **Noel Williams** *pilot the Starcross to a meeting with destiny*

INFOCOM have a reputation second to none in the world of text adventures, but in *Starcross* I think they have forgotten something. Why doesn't the package (disc, booklet and starmap) contain a screwdriver? If I had a screwdriver I could get into that infernal computer and turn the (expletives deleted) thing off. Some people might think its supercilious remarks are clever, even humorous (the computer itself obviously thinks so), but when you have just struggled for half an hour to land your ship on the temptingly mysterious planetary body ("not your ordinary asteroid" says the computer, helpfully) where, I ask you, is the humour in being told "The ship is at rest, but unfortunately, so are you." My ship was grabbed by an alien artifice and the resulting bump proved fatal.

If you want a computer that runs the whole range of useful comments from surly self-satisfaction ("Maybe next time you'll listen to me") to downright sarcasm ("Other than that things have been pretty dull around here"), you want to get on board the starship M.C.S. Starcross. Even if you don't you will find that Infocom's latest offering is another winner.

From the same stable as the ever-popular *Zork*, this game is very similar in presentation, structure and feel. The instructions booklet is virtually the same as for *Zork*, being Infocom's standard guide to text adventuring, which is fair enough as the text processing, command structure and version of English is identical to that of *Zork*. This means several sentences can be in one line of input, objects can be coupled together by the use of AND, indirect objects, such as 'in the cage' are allowed (but only one per sentence) and you can ask questions beginning 'What' or 'Where'. Sometimes this leads to odd output, like the response "What do you want to what?" but there has been a great effort to ensure reasonable response to the majority of likely commands. All this will be familiar to previous Infocom addicts but the delights of sophisticated input commands just are not appreciated by enough adventurers. In particular there is much less of the 'guess what two word combination works in this room' syndrome than in most adventures, as in several cases different words are allowed for the same action. Infocom deserve even wider recognition than they presently receive.



There is one major difference between *Starcross* and *Zork*. As you may have guessed, you can talk directly to the computer which (or rather, who) controls most of the happenings on your starship. Because you never invested in complete interfacing of computer to other ship's equipment (as it will readily remind you) you have to communicate with it through a natural language interface. (In more primitive times we used to call this 'talking' — you might have heard of it.) Well, this is what makes *Starcross* something special. Any command can be prefaced by "Computer" in which case it is taken as a direct conversational gambit directed at the computer. The conversation is not intelligent (in other words it is purely conditioned by whether you feed it key commands) but the vocabulary is so large (I have no reason to doubt the claimed 600 words) and the allowed sentence structures so flexible (compared with the painful and familiar two word format) that many of the exchanges seem perfectly natural. I must admit I have spent most of my time enjoying the comments of the computer rather than actually exploring the game. Probably this will become boring after a while, but not before you are well into the game and caught by its special set of problems.

The other thing that makes *Starcross* a little different from *Zork* is the map supplied with it. It shows the position of various 'masses' around your ship at the start of the game. These objects include asteroids, planets, ships and mystery objects. The player can steer the ship to any object once he or she has discovered how to pilot the thing (don't bother asking the computer). In this way you 'move' to different sets of locations and different problems. The only trouble is that the objects themselves are moving and the map becomes invalid after move 64, so you have an additional task, navigating around the heavens based on partial

information. The map includes the headings of the objects at the start of the game, so you should be able to figure out where they are later on. Well, you may be able to, but I'm having a little difficulty. In effect this is a game with moving rooms — a good idea and one sufficient to renovate the tried and trusted text adventure formula. I would not say that it feels like piloting a ship around the stars, but certainly some of the difficulties you encounter make the imaginary world that bit more enjoyable.

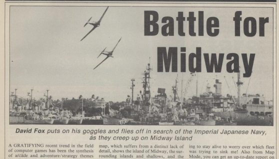
The initial scenario is perhaps a little hackneyed now for science fiction adventures. I have lost count of the number of times I have awoken as the only crewmember of an empty spaceship apparently knowing nothing about how to operate the ship or where things are. And some of the 'problems' are rather trivial, like remembering to stand up or to get out of your bunk. Taken to extremes this kind of necessary command could lead to adventures which require you to 'PLACE FOOT' each time you want to walk or to 'MOVE EYES' before attempting to read something. These are legitimate actions and could be adventure commands but they only bore the player and add nothing to the feel of the game. But such unoriginality and triviality is the exception in *Starcross*, especially once you get into the meat of the problem, solving a riddle set aeons ago.

As is usual with Infocom the room descriptions are excellent. Who needs graphics? Some descriptions are so long that they will not fit on the screen, and all are intriguing, humorous and give plenty to think about. Not only this but they are correctly spelt (making due allowance for colonialisms). There is one slight drawback, of course, with such a large game — it is only available on disc. It is, however, almost worth investing in a disc drive to be able to play such games. I had a little difficulty loading my copy and once, when loaded, it crashed mid-program.

Other than this I could find no serious bugs in the game, though I must admit I have not solved it yet and am not likely to without many more hours play. The need to access the disc slows things down a little on occasions and disc access does happen rather frequently. If your drive is prone to errors, you might want to leave this game alone as nothing could be more frustrating than a head crash midway through such a game, but the delays during normal operation are no greater than many games which involve decoding text.

All in all another winner from Infocom.□

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adventure | : | Starcross |
| Micro | : | Commodore 64 |
| Format | : | Disc |
| Price | : | £11.99 |
| Supplier | : | Commodore UK |



# Battle for Midway

***David Fox** puts on his goggles and flies off in search of the Imperial Japanese Navy, as they creep up on Midway Island*

A GRATIFYING recent trend in the field of computer games has been the synthesis of arcade and adventure/strategy themes into single programs.

Some players would deny that the shoot-'em-up aspects of arcade games have any place in the more thoughtful, intellectual challenges of adventures and simulations. However, it's always been my feeling that so long as the sleight-of-hand joystick bashing doesn't totally overwhelm the strategy elements of the game, the mixture of chance and hand-eye coordination which arcade elements introduce into a game make for greater realism, and allow less chance for monotony to creep in.

PSS's *Battle of Midway* is a good attempt to combine these two elements, and in my opinion perhaps fails only in not going far enough.

*Midway* is certainly not the most complex strategy game around, although the preproduction manual I was given suggests that the final product will contain enough information to make at least half-an-hour's study of the rules necessary before attempting to play!

For those of you unfamiliar with your history, the Battle of Midway was a crucial point of the Pacific conflict of World War Two. The PSS *Midway* manual gives full historical details, but to summarize briefly, the island of Midway had to be defended by the American carriers Yorktown, Hornet and Enterprise to prevent Japanese landings which would have opened up the way to an invasion of Hawaii and eventually the American mainland.

On loading the game, from disc or tape, you must first select keyboard or joystick control. The control key for "joystick" is "S", for some reason, which caught me out first time since I instinctively pressed "J". Never mind.

There are three game levels and six speeds available.

Each game begins in Map mode. The map, which suffers from a distinct lack of detail, shows the island of Midway, the surrounding islands and shallows, and the disposition of your American fleets and courses of the Japanese invasion fleets. This last detail appears only in mode 1, which is intended largely for practice purposes; in mode 2 the courses of the Japanese fleets are not marked, and in mode 3 the Japanese fleet is blessed with extra carriers.

## Com Box

The graphics in map mode are chunky but acceptable. To manoeuvre your fleets you use a square cursor which is controlled by keyboard or joystick, and which is designated the Com Box.

Your forces consist of sea fleets, search aircraft shown with a surrounding search area (square instead of circular, which I would have thought would have been more accurate) and later in the game, attack aircraft. The Japanese forces are represented by sea fleets and attack aircraft, all of which are invisible on the map unless they fall within the search area of a search squadron.

Units are moved by placing the Com Box over them; pressing the trigger so that the box changes colour; moving to the new position; and pressing the trigger again. The units then begin to move in stages, at a speed determined by the speed option you selected earlier. A game-time clock at the top of the screen ticks over in intervals of ten minutes, and it's important to keep an eye on this clock since after a certain time Midway becomes more likely to be attacked.

While in Map Mode, you have the option to read the Unit Book, which gives the relative strengths of the American and Japanese fleets. This is apparently useful in working out which Japanese fleet you are currently in conflict with, though whenever I got to that stage I was much too busy trying to stay alive to worry over which fleet was trying to sink me! Also from Map Mode, you can get an up-to-date report on losses and damage to each fleet.

Having used your search aircraft to locate a Japanese fleet — which is indicated by a "J" appearing overlaid on the search area — you can get an aerial view of the fleet by pressing "R", then use the Unit Book to work out which fleet it is.

Your next task is to launch attack aircraft, which is accomplished through another menu page. This tells you which units are ready to launch, which are arming, how long it will take for them to battle-ready, and so on. It's a pity that there aren't any graphics in this section — it would liven things up a bit if you had an animated sequence of the planes taking off.

There's a nice animated section when you guide your attack aircraft to the Japanese fleet — tiny planes dodge and weave avoiding flak, and you can use your joystick to take the role of the Japanese anti-aircraft gunners and try to shoot the planes down with lines of tracer fire. Should you be unlucky enough to sustain an air attack on Midway island, there's a similar sequence in which you have to contend against Japanese fighter-bombers with your own guns.

## Direct hit

Unfortunately, though these arcade sequences are beautifully animated and have excellent sound effects, they don't contribute much to the progress of the game. You can never be sure if your shots, or those of the other anti-aircraft guns which are operating, are responsible for the destruction of a plane; and in any case it doesn't seem to make much difference, since you inevitably end up with the message "GUN DESTROYED BY DIRECT HIT" on the screen, and a smouldering mass on the ground.

A Japanese air attack on your fleet has

similar results, whereas a sea attack features a slightly different sequence, in which flashes on the horizon are your only clue to the position of the Japanese ships at which you fire your artillery.

### Hectic

After a day of hectic searching and shooting, you'll have to return your planes to their carriers, and use the Launch menu to land them again, since they aren't allowed to fly at night. The game clock runs twice as quickly at night, but beware, since attacks are still possible.

Should all three of your aircraft carriers fall victim to Japanese air attacks, you'll hear what must be the Japanese National Anthem, and see the Rising Sun emblem being hoisted. Presumably if you sink the four main Japanese warships, you'll see the Stars and Stripes — I must admit I never did that well!

Battle of Midway has many good features, and a full range of SAVE and LOAD options which make it possible to return to a half-finished game. It suffers, though, from poorly-designed menu screens, insufficiently integrated arcade sequences (they should play a much greater part in the game), and if anything a superfluity of detail on the historical background to the battle. Reading section 16 of the manual — "Basic Tactics — How to Win" — gives you so much help that you wonder whether the game is worth playing. It would perhaps have been better to give less detail, or, to be honest, to have designed a battle strategy game around fictional rather than real events. Fantasy strategy games have, I would have thought, become so popular partly because the element of the unexpected is very strong. *Battle of Midway* doesn't have much of this element — I enjoyed playing it once or twice, but it could have been a perennial favourite had a little more thought gone into its design.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Game** | : *Battle for Midway* |
| **Micro** | : *Commodore 64* |
| **Format** | : *Cassette or disc* |
| **Price** | : *£9.95 cassette, £12.95 disc* |
| **Supplier** | : *PSS, 452 Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry CV6 5DG* |

JUNE 4 05.38

MILUOKIBANK

MIDWAY IS.

LAYSAN IS.

# Pandora's box

**Adventure** *Odyssey of Hope* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£5.95* **Supplier** *Martech / Software Communications*

PANDORA — the first woman! She was fashioned from clay at the direction of Zeus, and all the Gods gave her a gift. (Pan-Dora: all gifts). Thus, Apollo bequeathed to her the talent to sing; Zeus gave her a box, which he cautioned her never to open — what a sauce! And what a temptation. Of course, she succumbed and "let loose all the ills that now beset man; disease and sorrow, hate and jealousy, theft, lies and many more." Hope alone was left. Now, some has stolen Hope, and all the ills have taken over the world. You, as the adventurer, have been chosen to undertake an Odyssey, to find and restore Hope to its guardian on Mount Olympus, home of the Gods.

This is the opening preamble, contained on one side of the tape. *Odyssey of Hope* is "a Classical Graphic Adventure", an allusion to the Greek mythology contained therein.

The introduction is rather nifty, consisting of the turning pages of a book, on which are written the aforementioned introduction (no instructions, however, are forthcoming), and apart from the slowly turning pages, there is also a little graphic of various Ills, floating up into the air, from where they hope to destroy the world. Although the program contained in my preview copy sometimes got rather confused and overwrote the previous graphics, the idea is nevertheless unusual and a pleasant change. Loading the main program should be a simple matter of turning over the tape, but again, my review copy had trouble with this, and I found myself having to NEW the instructions and LOADing the second part separately. I'm sure all this will be sorted out on the release copies.

On to the adventure: the player is first of all asked if a previously saved game is to be loaded — the only input is the full word (YES or NO), no abbreviations are accepted. It's not a big deal to type two or three letters instead of one, but the seasoned adventurer experiences a brief shudder up his back! Is this indicative of the friendliness of the program as a whole? I'm afraid it is.

INVENTORY is definitely not accepted, but I is: NORTH elicits the response "Incorrect Input, try again," and N is the Correct Input. Similarly, SEARCH will do you no good, but try EXAMINE. The program is written in Basic, so responses are little slower than we have become used to, which means that the player spends an inordinate time waiting for the program to wake up — really annoying if the wrong key is pressed (and beware hitting Q — for Quit — you can't get back into the game!). The graphics, however, are held in memory, and thus are commendably quick to appear on-screen, although the other side of this coin is that they are not great works of art, being rather blocky and simplified representations of the scene. The pictures do, though, include a constant display of objects at the scene, and an Inventory if it has been asked for.

How many locations there are, I haven't the faintest — no Help sheet was supplied with the review copy, and I haven't got very far into the adventure. This is partly due to a closed door in one location, the secret of opening which I haven't yet found, and partly due to the program's habit of killing you off every so often.

The graphics are, however, often accompanied by sound effects, which is pretty unusual: the python hisses, deadly bees buzz and so on. Actually, I may be churlish in saying this, but they got on my wick in very short order; once the infernal noise starts, one has to sit through it until the bitter end!

All in all, a reasonable knockabout. The graphics and sound don't add a bean to the atmosphere, of which there is none, despite the occasional appearance of nefarious monsters. The puzzles seem of the standard type (i.e., Here is a Closed Door/Dangerous Snake — how do you Open it/Kill it?), and a beginner would find it interesting. A more experienced adventurer would, I believe, yearn for something more unusual and friendly. **TB**

## SOFTWARE INVENTORY

**What's on the way in the adventure world — if you have a new adventure, war game or real-life simulation which you are about to release send a copy and accompanying details to Software Inventory, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD**

# Knight's move

**Adventure** *Fame Quest* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Braingames, Amplicon Group, Richmond Road, Brighton BN2 3RL.*

I HAVE always thought I would make an excellent knight in shining armour, despite the problem of finding a helmet large enough, and Fame Quest gave me a chance to test my mettle (or should it be metal?). This game involves wandering around 'talking' to creatures (a euphemism for exercising your sword arm) and thereby winning fame and fortune.

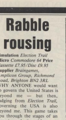
Reward comes in the form of fame points. As a knight of the lowest level, you need 20 points to be promoted. There are nine levels. As you would expect, some fame comes from successfully doing deeds of derring-do (the bloodier the better) but you can also win fame and gold by being honest when you talk to such creatures as old men, monks and ladies, or doing what they require of you. (You'll have to guess what old men, monks and ladies may require — suffice it to say that this adds a nice touch of variety to the game).




*Famequest* is one of the better implementations of this type of game. Each encounter is illustrated with an appropriate graphic, and combat is also given graphically (if in a very wooden manner). Information on your current possessions and the arms you are carrying is also shown pictorially rather than textually. In fact the whole screen layout, with its five 'windows', and the error trapped menu driven instructions, is attractive and carefully thought out.

Text is printed in a 'period' script which gives the game some flavour but which is difficult to read in places. Some attempt has also been made to mimic mediaeval language, though this has led to at least one error ('canst' does not mean 'cannot'). All in all an attractive package, not startingly original but much more playable than many similar games. **NW**

# Rabble rousing



**Simulation** *Election Trail*
**Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *Cassette £7.95/Disc £9.95*
**Supplier** *Braingames, Amplicon Group, Richmond Road, Brighton BN2 3RL*

WHY ANYONE would want to govern the United States is beyond me — but then, judging from *Election Trail*, governing the USA is also beyond me. This game takes you through the stages of an American election either as a two player game, or as a one player game, with the computer controlling the Democrats.

There is a bewildering range of actions that can be taken but you are guided through each with sensible menu structures seldom requiring you to press more than one key. You can take part in public debates, hold party rallies, seek endorsements from abroad or various people at home, raise funds, issue press releases and so on. I specially like the press release feature because the computer journalists have a habit of misrepresenting what you say. On one occasion the press release that "Defence systems are substantial" was interpreted by the press as a pledge to reduce defence spending and on another the pious belief that all people should be equal was interpreted to mean that I was going to reduce the power of the unions!



CBM 64

The main aim of the game is to increase popularity, hence votes, by a series of correct choices in twenty moves. It is difficult to say how good a simulation it is. Clearly some of the responses are virtually random, but it seems realistic enough and certainly as a game it is very enjoyable. However, I think it would also serve as a useful introduction to some of the features of an election campaign for children and therefore may have a minor educational value. Children may also learn from the nicely drawn map of the US with its inventory of the states and will certainly enjoy the little graphic interludes that illustrate each choice. **NW**

# Wizard!



**Adventure** *Wizardry* **Micro** *IBM PC/PC jr* **Price** *£43.15*
**Format** *Disc*
**Publisher** *Sir Tech Software Inc. 6 Main Street, Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669*

IN A SENSE this is a fantasy adventure that can be created and re-created by the player. The instructions, and possible scenarios, are at first overwhelming, but gradually will make sense. You will soon be able to get on with the hunt for loot and glory.

What you need to play the game is an IBM PC or PC jr with a minimum of 64K and a disc drive of course. What you receive is one copy of the Master disc, two manuals (one for getting started and one for playing the game) and a wizardry map plotting aid, which has some 20 pages all for your usage.

Before playing the game some backup work is necessary. The game will boot up into a menu. The first time round you must select U for utilities. Briefly this will enable you to make a Scenario diskette as a first time player and then use that disc to play from then on. There are other options within the utility option which enable you to move characters from one game to another, recover lost characters, backup characters and change character names.

Up to six people can play at once, each player in control of one or more characters. The first time around you will need to visit the training grounds to create and prepare a new character. There is an enormous list of possible characters all with different qualities and abilities. A few are fighter, Mage, Priest, Thief, Bishop, Samurai, and Lord.

The castle is the starting point for all adventures and is also the place where you must buy your equipment and get your party together.

Once you have gone through the many steps to prepare ▶

# Birds of Prey

**Adventure** *System 15000*
**Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£12.95* **Format** *Cassette*
**Supplier** *Craig Communications*

DID YOU thrill to *Wargames?* Were you rooted to TV's *Whizz Kids?* Do you read reports of million pound computer frauds and think "If I had the right equipment, I could stop all that?" Well, *System 15000* is your chance to try.

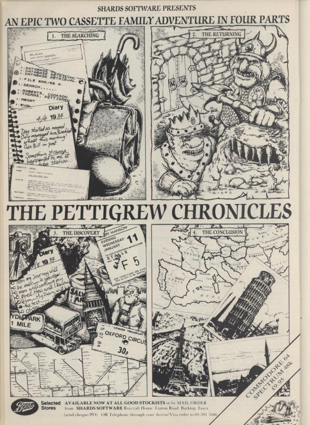
Not that you will actually be able to tap into the phone lines, illegally penetrate secret databases or download company secrets without leaving a trace — but you will be able to enjoy all the thrills and spills of simulating these hackers' delights. *System 15000* is a game about a computer communication system called (and here's a coincidence) System 15000. It's a computer game about a possible computer reality, the use of this new communication software to detect the perpetrators of a computer fraud and return stolen funds of $1,500,000 to a company called Comdata.



So far this sounds like a somewhat original version of the 'find the villain and return the treasure' type of adventure, which it is. But the plot hides the major difference between this game and all other adventures because it attempts to simulate a real communication system and all the stages you would have to go through to carry out this investigation as if you were actually running the communications software on your CBM 64. Confused? You won't be after the next example I can assure you. Honest.

Suppose you want to contact Kingsdown Polytechnic to tap their special list to find the the code for L.T. Perry to call him to interrogate his database to see if he knows the code of the data system used by Midminster Bank where you have to deposit the retrieved resources. You have to dial the phone number of Kingsdown so you select function key 3 and the phone rings (the CBM 64 produces a tone which is too convincing, even to the extent of simulating engaged lines on some occasions). This puts you into their computer, but you then have to type in the code for access to the data you want. If you know it then you can get the information you want, make the call to Perry and try to crack his code. Find the information and move on to Midminster.

The simulation is convincing, well structured and logical. The codes are difficult to crack but generally logical when you know the answer and most of them seem to be provided somewhere in someone's data if only you can get access to it. I enjoyed this welcome change from traditional format. Whilst dedicated hackers might find it not a complete representation of the environment they know and love (for example it seems that there is really only one 'correct' route through the data you are given but in reality there might be several) most people will find it consistently convincing. **NW**



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4. THE CONCLUSION
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◀ for adventure you may enter the maze and explore the depths of *Wizardry*. This takes you into an amazing 3D display with text information along the bottom of the screen. To move around, the commands are entered in the form L for left and R to move right etc.

You will often encounter monsters that will need to be avoided or fought. This can be done by having one of your party fight for you, using magic spells, or fighting yourself. Things do not always go as you expect them to. One of your party may refuse to fight or be quickly defeated. You may even pick the wrong spell!

*Wizardry* really needs to be played for some time by more than one person to even begin to get to grips with the many challenges and do the game justice. I had a limited time and had to do battle on my own. However, *Wizardry* comes highly recommended and is a must for all of you with an IBM PC or access to one. **KB**

# Colditz

**Adventure** *Castle Colditz* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£6.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *K-Tel International*

TWO GAMES for the price of one sounds like excellent value, but in the case of this double-sided offering from K-Tel I'm rather doubtful. On one side you get *Castle Colditz*, a traditional text-only adventure in which you have to (what else?) escape from the infamous German prison camp. Then on side two — and in complete contrast — there is a mildly amusing arcade game called *Battle of the Toothpaste Tubes*.

If you can remember the TV series of the Colditz story you'll probably expect *Castle Colditz* to be just as exciting. Sadly, though, this version fails to make the most of what is potentially an addictive scenario.

You set out from the prisoners' room, through numerous rooms and passages, collecting Nazi treasures as you make your way to the front gate. Unfortunately, many rooms are empty and you can wander about for ages, with not even a single German in sight.

There are a few objects scattered around the castle, while some exits are one-way only; set foot in one of these locations and, unless you have a very fast brain, you'll be terminated in a most unpleasant manner. Beware also of spending too much time trying to get through the window in the wine cellar; I nearly died of starvation several times.

The game responds quite fast to the usual verb-noun inputs and adequate instructions are provided on screen. Thankfully, you are warned that some locations are one-way only, although you are not told which until it's too late. You are advised to make a map, which I soon found to be sound advice.

Surprisingly, there are two notable omissions from this game: a help facility and a scoring system. You are told about the lack of the former in pretty blunt terms, while passing out through the front gate, weighed down with loot, is the only score that really matters.

This is a relatively straightforward and competent adventure, but for me it lacks atmosphere. **JF**

# The Ring returns

**Adventure** *Return of the Ring* **Micro** *Dragon 32* **Price** *£9.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Wintersoft, 30 Uplands Park Road, Enfield, Middlesex EN2 7PT*



AFTER *JAWS* there was *Jaws II*, and after *Raiders of the Lost Ark* came *Indiana Jones*, so after their success with *The Ring of Darkness* is it surprising that Wintersoft have followed it with *Return of the Ring*? Sequels can frequently be disappointing, with the makers trying to be different but not too different, so we can be thankful that Wintersoft seem to have got the balance right in presenting us with a graphics adventure that has the hallmark of the original but is far from being a boring repetition.

You begin in familiar fashion with the Start Side of the cassette allowing you to set up your chosen character, who can be human, elf or dwarf, and a trader, warrior or technician. You allocate 50 points between Regenerations (interesting inclusion, that), Intelligence, Strength and Charisma, with a minimum of ten points to each. Having done all that, and also named your character, you flip to the Game Side of the cassette to start play.

The story is that you are Ringbearer, and have taken the infamous Ring of Darkness from its guardian Gron, servant of the Evil Sage (no connection with the Evil Onions). In attempting to restore the Ring to its creators, the Masters of Ringworld, you mysteriously find yourself in a city on a decaying planet, with no communication between you and Ringworld, but a feeling of foreboding that the forces of the Evil Sage are at work. Now play on . . .

The game starts with a text adventure type of description: "You are in the regeneration room. Exits go north. Visible items here are: A dark ring — Shedir, A dagger." By pressing I for Inventory you also discover you are carrying four other rings, of copper, bronze, silver and gold; Now where did they come from? Typing STATUS tells you how your Gestalt Level is doing, along with Experience, Stamina, Maximum Stamina, and shows also that you start with 300 units each of Credits, Food and Crystals.

Resisting the temptation to take Shedir with you at once (watch out, there's a thief about . . . in fact dozens of them), typing N will take you outof the regeneration room and into the graphics maze of passages that makes up the city where you've found yourself: you see glimpses of mountains and woods beyond the outer walls.

As with the first game, there are a variety of places you can visit, some of which must be LOADed separately, though as I kept getting LOAD ERROR I had to be content with trying the ones contained within the main program.

As with *The Ring of Darkness*, you need several plays before you even begin to get to grips with how to approach the game, and can start to work out some order of priority for your visits, as well as remember to EAT regularly. The game operates quickly, incorporates a sophisticated text-reading system, accommodating such instructions as GIVE THE SACK OF MAGIC GRAIN TO MERAK THE ELF, and all in all *Return of the Ring* means a return to the Dragon keyboard for many more hours to come. **MG**

# Silent running

**Adventure** *Genesis II* **Micro** *48K Spectrum* **Price** *£6.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Mikro-Gen, 44 The Broadway, Bracknell, Berks.*

AS IF LIFE didn't have enough problems, you're now the sole surviving crew member on board the Genesis II, an Earth Colony Ship that has been captured by space pirates, and you have to save not only yourself but your cargo as well. No ordinary cargo this, as it is a collection of rare Earth animals being sent to populate a new world, plus a forest thrown in for good measure. Don't ask how you pack a forest on a space ship.

This is the kind of adventure that tests your map-making skills as there are several levels to the space-ship, and having moved NORTH, SOUTH, EAST and WEST to explore one level, you can then go UP or DOWN in the elevator shaft to start again on the next level. Not only that but there are metal grills set into the walls, and once you have found your Sonic Screwdriver you can open all the grills and then start to map out the ventilator shafts which criss-cross the space ship. In all there are about 100 locations, with 60 or so objects lying around. There seems no set rule about how many objects you can carry.

The space pirates pop up regularly, but for some reason wound you rather than kill you, so you need to find bandages to staunch the flow of blood, as well as food to eat. The tasks set you are not quite as direct as normal, though there are plenty of keys to track down to cope with all the locked doors in the corridors, and goodness knows where the forest and animals are stored.

I enjoyed the feel of *Genesis II*, as it allows you plenty of initial exploration, giving you fair warning if anything nasty was likely to happen, and while its scale isn't quite in the *Snowball* class it's a well-written and thorough adventure that should be well worth several visits. **MG**

# If you go down to the woods today

**Adventure** *The Forest of Doom* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Format** *Tape* **Price** *£6.95 (with book), £5.50 (tape alone)* **Publisher** *Puffin Books*

AN ANGUISHED sound like a cat in a liquidiser heralds the arrival of *Forest of Doom* for the Commodore 64, new this month from Puffin Books. Happily, this effect is short-lived and leads to a fine high-res display of a Wizard's Tower and the path into the ominously silent forest of Darkwood. A human skull on a tree stump seems to question your wisdom in taking on this Quest.

Using a map supplied by a mortally wounded dwarf you find your way to the home of the wizard Yaztromo, the tower of the opening screen. Yaztromo is, fortunately, a friendly sage and purveyor of various magical items. He is able to tell you that the dwarf was trying to recover the lost runes of his people stolen many years ago. The thief was, ironically, killed by goblins and the runes, in the form of four bronze medallions, scattered throughout Darkwood. They are now needed by Gillibran, the dwarven King, to unite his people against the trolls. At last, all is clear and you set off warily into the forest.

The play system will be familiar to fans of the Fighting Fantasy Books. It is based on three simple characteristics of Skill, Stamina and Luck which are determined by dice throws performed by the computer. These attributes are recorded on a colourful summary chart that also lists your possessions.

Combat is plentiful and is resolved on a screen depicting your foes in all their loathsome high-res splendour. Dice throws are modified by skill and the loser of the round has two stamina points deducted from his total. If your stamina falls below zero, alas, you are no more! Luck plays its part in helping avoid losing gold or vital stamina points in traps, ambushes etc.

Your progress is shown by voluminious descriptive text scrolling up the screen upon, what else, an ancient scroll. The game plays much like the books, or other solo quests, where you are generally offered a number of options at each game turn. Your task, therefore, is to pick a way through the forest that brings you to all four medallions before exiting to the north of the forest in Gillibran's village Careful selection of the items you buy from the wizard can greatly increase your chance of survival.

You will meet a great number of characters in the inhospitable forest; friendly friars, churlish dwarves, barbarians, trolls and wyverns, all greedy for your gold — or a piece of your hide! Unlike a conventional adventure there is no scope to retrace your steps and only many visits to the forest will tell you when to kill, when to grovel and when to stand proud.

The major drawback I found with the game was the wait involved as data is loaded when you move from one part of the forest to another. This really serves to lessen the excitement and detracts from the adventure as a whole, which is a shame.

Two other points I noted on my pre-release copy: upon dying or leaving the forest without all of the runes you are instructed to rewind the tape to 160 on the counter — but all my efforts at 160, 60 etc resulted in failure. This is not too serious as it's just as easy to reload from the start. Secondly, some items found in the adventure should add to your fighting ability, but mine did not seem to! I hope this is taken care of before copies are released.

Overall then, this is a well produced, colourful adventure that is fun and exciting to play. It has an addictive quality and deserves to do well. However, it is a game that begs to be produced on disk or Microdrive to remove those annoying waits. A Spectrum version is also available and, with the price cuts, please don't forget the Atari, Puffin! **KM**



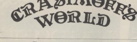



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EARTHWOOD is completely computer moderated but the turn sheet and replies are written in plain English so that you can easily understand them. No need to look through complex charts and code books to understand this game.




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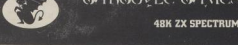
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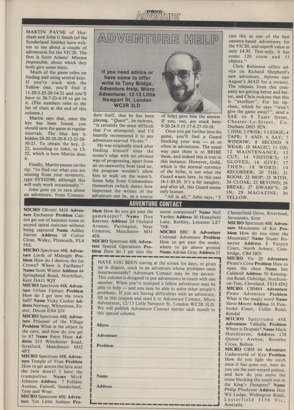

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# ADVENTURE HELP

**If you need advice or have some to offer write to Tony Bridge, Adventure Help, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD**

MARTIN PAYNE of Horsham and John G Smith (of the Sunderland Smiths) have written to me about a couple of adventures for the VIC20. The first is Scott Adams' *Mission Impossible*, about which they both give some hints.

Much of the game relies on finding and using several keys. If you're stuck with the Yellow one, you'll find it 11-20-3-25-20-14-21 and you'll have to 26-7-23-4-19 to get to it. (The numbers refer to the list of clues at the end of this column.)

Martin says that, once the key has been found, you should save the game at regular intervals. The blue key is hidden 28-20-28-20-8-12-21-20-30-21. To obtain the key, 2-22, according to John, or 13-22, which is how Martin does it.

Finally, Martin passes on the tip: "to find out what you are missing from your inventory, type SYS32590, although this will only work occasionally."

John goes on to rave about an adventure, from Commodore itself, that he has been playing. "*Quest*", he reckons, "is certainly the most difficult that I've attempted, and I'd heartily recommend it to any adventure-starved Vic-ers."

He was originally stuck after finding himself near the ocean's edge with no obvious way of progressing, apart from an un-seaworthy boat (and no, the program wouldn't allow him to walk on the water!). Some help from Commodore themselves (which shows how important the writers of the adventure can be, as a source of help) gave him the answer. If you, too, are stuck here: 9-20-24-5-15-17-6-27-10-18.

Once you get further into the game, you'll find a Guard blocking your way — as so often in adventures. The usual way past them is to BRIBE them, and indeed this is true in this instance. However, Gold, which is the normal currency of the bribe, is not what the Guard wants here. In this case 16-1-20-29. It's a bit naughty, and after all, this Guard seems only human.

"All in all," John says, "I rate this as one of the best cassette-based adventures for the VIC20, and superb value at only £4.95. Text-only, it has some 120 room and 53 objects."

Chris Robinson offers advice on Richard Shepherd's new adventure, *Inferno* (see August's *MAD* for a review). The releases from this company are getting better and better, and Chris reckons that this is "excellent". For his tipsheet, which he says "won't give the game away!", send a SAE to 9 Tuart Street, Chester-Le-Street, Co. Durham DH3 3EN.

1 HIM; 2 FRISK; 3 LEDGE; 4 TAPE; 5 AND; 6 SAY; 7 WINDOW; 8 SECOND 9 WEAR; 10 MAGIC; 11 ON; 12 MAINTENANCE; 13 CUT; 14 VISITOR'S; 15 GLOVES; 16 GIVE; 17 THEN; 18 WORD; 19 RECORDER; 20 THE; 21 ROOM; 22 MOP; 23 WITH; 24 CLOAK; 25 BEYOND; 26 BREAK; 27 DWARF'S; 28 IN; 29 MAGAZINE; 30 YELLOW.

# ADVENTURE CONTACT

**MICRO** Olivetti M24 **Adventure** Enchanter **Problem** Cannot get out of hammer room or ascend spiral staircase without being captured **Name** Ashley Davies **Address** 18 Culver Close, Widey, Plymouth, PL6 5NL

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Lords of Midnight **Problem** How do I destroy the Ice Crown? Where is Farflame? **Name** Scott Winter **Address** 44 Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent DA11 9QY

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Urban Upstart **Problem** How do I get into the town hall? **Name** Vicky Cocker **Address** Norway, Whitestone, Exeter, Devon EX4 2JV

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Prisoner of the Village **Problem** What is the object in the cave, and how do you get to it? **Name** Peter Hunt **Address** 213 Winchester Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 4PT

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Temple of Vran **Problem** How to get across the lava near the twin doors? I have the trampoline. **Name** Mick Johnson **Address** 7 Folldon Avenue, Fulwell, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear.

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Ten Little Indians **Problem** How do you get past the gamekeeper? **Name** Don Keevney **Address** 24 Orchard Avenue, Partington, Near Urmston, Manchester M31 4DL

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Special Operations **Problem** How do I get into the secret compound? **Name** Neil Varden **Address** 30 Homefield Lane, Rothley, Leicester LE7 7NE

**MICRO** BBC B **Adventure** Colossal Adventure **Problem** How to get past the snake, where to go above ground **Name** Adrian Gray **Address** 35 Chesterfield Drive, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, Kent

**MICRO** Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Mountains of Ket **Problem** How do you enter the Mountain? **Name** Stuart Ronayne **Address** 8 Turpyn Court, North Arbury, Cambridge, CB4 2RN

**MICRO** Vic 20 **Adventure** Pirate's Cove **Problem** How to open the chest **Name** Ian Caldwell **Address** 50 Kensington Road, Oxbridge, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland, TS18 4DQ

**MICRO** CBM64 **Adventure** Pirate Adventure **Problem** What is the magic word **Name** Steve Moore **Address** 31 Pembroke Court, Collin Road, Kendal

**MICRO** Spectrumn 48K **Adventure** Valhalla **Problem** Where is Drapnir? **Name** Mark Hutchinson, **Address** 138 Queen's Avenue, Bromley Cross, Bolton.

**MICRO** CBM 64 **Adventure** Underworld of Kyn **Problem** How do you light the torch once it has gone out, how do you use the anti-wizard potion, and how do you move the stone blocking the south exit in the King's Dungeon? **Name** Philip Pluckrose **Address** Hen Wil Lodge, Wellington Road, Lysterfield 3156 Vic, Australia.

HAVE YOU BEEN staring at the screen for days, or given up in disgust, stuck in an adventure whose problems seem insurmountable? Adventure Contact may be the answer. This column is designed to put adventurers in touch with one another. When you're stumped a fellow adventurer may be able to help — and you may be able to solve other people's problems. If you are having difficulties with an adventure, fill in this coupon and send it to Adventure Contact, Micro Adventurer, 12/13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD. We will publish Adventure Contact entries each month in this special column.

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BOARD WALK

New board games and role playing games reviewed

# Ringworld rôle playing

**Game** *Ringworld* **Format** *Role Playing Game* **Publisher** *Chaosium* **Price** *£22.95* **Supplier** *Games Workshop.*

THE PAK looped a million-mile-wide, harder-than-steel ribbon around a star and set the ribbon spinning. Like a lariat the scrith band spun evenly, in an orbit comparable to Earth's. Air came, and water and soil, and beneath a sun always at high noon, lived and died man-like beings who knew no other reality.

Mysteriously, the Pak died out, but upon the Ring there came to be many species with intelligence — Ghouls, City Builders, Grass Giants, Machine People — and their empires and destinies grew bright or dimmed. Then expeditions from the far stars came, changing the fortunes of Ringworld as surely as Ringworld changed Known Space — the little bubble of stars which Earthmen know.

*Ringworld* is a brilliantly original role-playing game from Chaosium based on six books by sci-fi master Larry Niven and is produced with his approval and co-operation. Numerous other stories and novels have been combed for additional material by game author John Hewitt and his team and a wealth of enormously detailed background material is supplied to Gamesmasters and players.

Basically, players, under the watchful gaze of the Gamemaster, assume the roles of explorers from the three intelligent species who occupy the worlds of Known Space. These travellers may equip themselves with the best twenty-ninth century technology and set forth on their voyage of discovery beneath the Great Arch of Ringworld.

The game system supplied in the superbly illustrated box is complete — even down to cardstock figures (which can be replaced with metal figures from Ral Partha). A noteworthy feature is that character sheets are supplied with permission to photocopy — something TSR and others should note! The most needed tables are reproduced on a handy reference sheet.

The game information is supplied in four separate volumes and I shall examine each in turn:

Firstly, the *Explorer Book* which opens with an introduction to Known Space and the era of Ringworld exploration. The concept and ethics of exploration are given some consideration and it is clear that the game is essentially a subtle campaign to gain information about the Ringworld cultures and to advance the technology of Known Space, rather than wholesale killing and looting of artefacts. Explorers who don't make friends will not live long despite the miraculous medical capabilities of the late twenty-ninth century!

Character creation is, of course, dealt with in some detail although experienced roleplayers will notice many similarities with Chaosium's hit *Call of Cthulhu* and other D100 system games. Human characters are recommended to begin with.

The character's main attributes are quickly determined, by following the precise instructions given, with dice throws and the results noted on the character sheets. Occupation and previous pursuits are then dealt with — again by random throws. An explorer might have many previous pursuits due to the people of this age being virtually immortal! Skills are extremely well covered and some 53 types are used in the game system. Obviously, the higher an explorer's skill at a particular activity, the greater his/her chance of using it successfully in the game situation. These skills may be improved by various means during the game.

The game system section covers Experience, Movement, Combat, Damage and Natural Hazards and is presented in a clear and logical manner with all essential tales of figures being highlighted and reproduced in the Reference Sheet.

The *Explorer Book* continues with a wealth of detail on the geography, ecology, recent history and politics of the major planets of Known Space to encourage player's understanding of their cultural background, standards and genealogy. This will, of course, also add to the Gamemaster's ability to judge a players reaction as being in or out of character when compared to his/her racial role.

The final section of this book covers the creation of non-human characters and is supplemented by a Glossary of Known Space Terms which is extremely useful to both new explorers and those familiar with the *Ringworld* novels.

The huge amount of information presented may seem a little daunting to the uninitiated and experienced alike — but, following the instructions, I was able to produce a character in just under an hour and I'm sure this could be halved with practice.

The *Technology Book* is, thankfully, half the size of the *Explorer Book*. Equipment is detailed according to its various characteristics and effect on game situations. Many items are illustrated and all are presented in a refreshingly light-hearted way which helps learning.

The *Creature Book* is intended primarily for the Gamemaster and describes the non-player entities of *Ringworld*. There are five sections covering Aliens, Pak, Hominids, Animals and Flora. The entries within each section are dealt with uniformly and include Decription, Weapons, Skills and Other Features. Detail, once again, is exhaustive and allows explorers of these races to be generated at the discretion of the Gamemaster. Many of the species are featured in the excellent illustrations.

Last, but by no means least, the *Gamemaster Book* which begins with a technical description of *Ringworld* that I can only describe as awesome! Gamemaster notes give some idea of the design of scenarios, technology and creature culture. The end of this book is dedicated to a scenario which provides an ideal beginning to a campaign and includes the starship, landing and first encounters with the life of *Ringworld*.

Thoroughness and first-class descriptions and illustrations are evident throughout the package. Although many hours of diligent reading are required to gain useful familiarity with the game, the style and delightful presentation mean this time is happily given. Within minutes I was totally engrossed preparing my explorer for his first sight of *Ringworld*.

The game retails at £22.95 but the price may come down if the importers, Games Workshop, are licensed to produce the game in the UK. Nevertheless, given the wealth of detail and the immense scope of the system, the price is fair and purchase of the game will provide years of fun for the owner and friends.

In summary I can do no better than quote from the introduction of the *Explorer Book*.

"The vastness of the Ring, the richness and variety of its trillion inhabitants, the diversity of its cultures and technologies, and the sophistication and power of the forces which guard the Ring force every expedition to be explorational. Even the foulest brigands of the spaceways can hardly avoid being intrigued and impressed by the greatest structure ever made by intelligence."

The *Ringworld Companion*, due shortly, will provide scenarios for this unique game and simplify the tasks for would-be Gamemasters.

It's love at first sight — so go out and buy the Ring! It is the best sci-fi roleplayer I've seen. ***Ken Matthews***



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# LINEFEED

**Computer books, game books, science fiction and fantasy books reviewed.**

***Peter Berlin** reviews some of the game book series on the market*

## The original

**Books** *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain, The Citadel of Chaos, The Forest of Doom, Starship Traveller, City of Thieves, Deathtrap Dungeon, Island of the Lizard King.* **Authors** *Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone.* **Publisher** *Puffin.* **Price** *£1.50.*

THE JACKSON and Livingstone series of game books give every appearance of having been adapted wholesale from old dungeons the authors had lying around.

There is not necessarily anything wrong with this. Solitaire *Dungeons and Dragons*, although it strikes me as a contradiction in terms, has always been greatly in demand and these two British role playing pioneers have taken note of the successful methods of computer gamers and produced nine highly playable solo adventures.

Indeed, three of the books are adventures set in dungeons and all the others are in very familiar FRP environments. *Starship Traveller* is clearly modelled on the popular *Traveller* games but all the other are heavily *D & D* based and contain creatures, combat and encounters which will all be cosily familiar to any moderately experienced player.

This is my main objection to the books — there's nothing at all surprising in them. Even were they normal multi-player adventures I wouldn't very much want to play in them. A good dungeon is more than just a succession of rooms filled with various monsters and treasure and magic. I would like to see a little flair, a little of the linking imagination which makes the best adventures hang together.

*Ian Livingstone, Warlock co-author*

The games are solid and consistent and almost totally free of bugs. Seven different artists have produced decent illustrations. If you want to play a very ordinary FRP game by yourself then this is ideal. It would seem, judging from Warlock's outrageous sales figures that a lot of people do.

## Ability

**Books** *The Grailquest Series: 1 Castle of Darkness 2 The Den of Dragons.* **Author** *J H Brennan* **Publisher** *Armada* **Price** *£1.50.*

THE MECHANICS of *Grailquest* are similar to those of other game books. The 'plot' is a flow chart put in words. Brennan's plot is less sophisticated and has fewer 'turns' than most others and the combat system is rather crude, but the game does make some provision for experience which is unusual.

But Grailquest's strength, and its weakness, is the harmony between Brennan's writing and his games-mastering style. There is no doubt that it is over the top and some players may find the long passages of text tedious — the first forty-five pages contain one piece of 'play' while Brennan expansively sets the scene for the rest of the adventure.

Some of the incidents are a little peculiar too. Brennan prefers to have a few well developed scenes rather than a large number of ordinary ones. An example of his eccentric style is the poetry fiend who demands that players write him some verse. I thought this a little cute but it is clear that Brennan is aiming for a younger audience and his determination to make the players use their brains is a welcome change.

One room is impossible to escape from unless players solve a code — the clever touch being that Brennan lets you work out that you have to break the code.

Grailquest's skimpy adventure will disappoint hardened games players, but I have no doubt that his approach is the one game books will have to take. As the readership becomes more discriminating the simple ability to write, which Brennan displays, will become an essential element.

## Sorceror

**Books** *Steve Jackson's Sorcery; The Shamutanti Hills; Khare, Cityport of Thieves; the Seven Serpents.* **Author** *Steve Jackson.* **Publisher** *Puffin.* **Price** *£1.95.*

THIS SERIES of books builds in several ways on the previous Jackson / Livingstone series of game books. In every respect it marks a significant advance. The games are more sophisticated, and the adventures are more involving and exciting. The series is more attractively packaged and the higher price and cunning way in which the sequels are tied into the first book shows that Jackson's already highly developed financial acumen has grown at least as quickly as his understanding of game books.

The player is searching through the badlands for the staff of law. The territory is so large that no adventurer could possibly cover it in one book: hence the four inter-linked ones. An 'epic', we are told.

The basic combat system and the flat writing style are identical to the Warlock series, but there are several significant developments. The most noteworthy is the magic ▶

◀ system. A series of spells are listed at the back of the books, each designated by a three letter word. Each time a player has an encounter they are offered the option of fighting or throwing a spell. Seven three letter words are listed; some are not spells, and some are inappropriate spells. Players must rely on memory when they make their decision. Cheating is, of course, possible but it's more fun not to.

The other great improvement is the way each book hangs together as a campaign-type adventure. Every creature encountered is there for a purpose, and there is a pleasing consistency of feel to the whole book. The adventure is also more realistic because of the need for rest and food every 'day'.

My only concern is that there are far too many bugs. For example, I found two relating to one encounter with a witch called Alianna. There is a beggar who may give the player a key, with a number written on it; but when I tried to unlock Alianna's cage with it, the section I was told to go to was inappropriate. Worse, Alianna rewards her rescuer with glue, but when I tried to throw a GUM spell at a Giant Bat I encountered that night the book informed me I did not have the necessary glue.

Glitches apart, however, these are without doubt the best game books on the market.

# Wolvesbane

**Books** *The Lone Wolf series: Flight from the Dark and Fire on the Water.* **Authors** *Joe Dever and Gary Chalk.* **Publisher** *Sparrow books.* **Price** *£1.50.*

THESE BOOKS are a qualified success. At its best it is one of the most exciting of the game-book series; there is, for example, a marvellous stage-coach incident in *Fire on the Water* which makes good use of the illustrations and should test the wits of the best players.

On the other hand the sequence of actions is sometimes messy and difficult to follow. There are far too many unavoidable deaths with no advanced warning. No self-respecting dungeon-master would offer the players an apparently harmless choice which results in them being ripped to shreds by Giaks and other nasties. This Chalk and Dever do quite frequently.

Another problem is that there is far too much padding. It is possible for a player to go through four or five 'turns' in a row which contain only choices of direction (and no, I did not fall for the old double crossroads trick which allows the player to spend hours doubling back).

The *Lone Wolf* series also suffers from 'playability' problems. Readers must keep one finger in the page they are on to keep their place. Then they use another finger to turn to the next page. They must have another two fingers in the front of the book, one marking the map of Magnamund and another the action chart/combat record. They must also keep two fingers in the back of the book, one noting the combat rules and the other on the randon number table.

Players then seize their pencil with the six fingers of the other hand and, to decide combat, use it to select a random number. If you want to cheat and peek at two or three options at once life becomes very difficult.

*Gary Chalk Lone Wolf co-author and artist*

Another, rather more serious, problem appears in the second book. The player will have chosen a number of Kai disciplines: if a particular one is not taken, then the grand climax of *Fire on the Water* becomes a damp squib, as the magical Sommerswerd cannot be properly used.

Good fun, is the verdict, but could do better. As with all the books if they had been put together with more care and thought they could have been much better. Lone Wolf isn't sloppy, just obvious and unimaginative.

# Young

**Books** *The 'Zork' series: Forces of the Krill, The Malifestro Quest and The Cavern of Doom.* **Author** *S. Eric Meretzky.* **Publisher** *Puffin.* **Price** *£1.25.*

MOST GAME-BOOKS claim to be aimed at a young audience but the Zork trilogy are the only ones to show any evidence of having been written with child readers specifically in mind.

For this reason they are more 'book' and less 'game' than any of the other game-books on the market. They are not particularly well written but contain several devices which clearly indicate Meretzky's awareness of who he is writing for.

There are far fewer units of action than in any other book and these are arranged sequentially which means that anybody with a reasonably good memory could read the book straight through from cover to cover.

No dice are involved, which again makes the books easier to 'play'. This is not a great disadvantage because Meretzky is unusually fair and the book adheres reasonably consistently to a traditional fairy tale logic with certain virtues rewarded and 'bad' habits like inquisitiveness, laziness and recklessness usually penalized.

The book has both boy and girl heros and so avoids the usual sexual stereotyping. There is much less blood and guts than is usual. What violence there is is the province of baddies and adults, and the player is rewarded for niceness.

There are, however, some nice touches. On a couple of occasions Meretzky throws in a cute trap to catch cheats and the first book contains one of the few examples of illustrations which are more than purely decorative but which actually provide the player with important information. This obvious device seems to be quite beyond the scope of the majority of authors.

The *Krill* series are not great game-books, but they are the best game-books for young children. Which isn't saying very much. They hardly compare, though, with Infocom's *Zork* series which they are supposedly based on. □



# Classified



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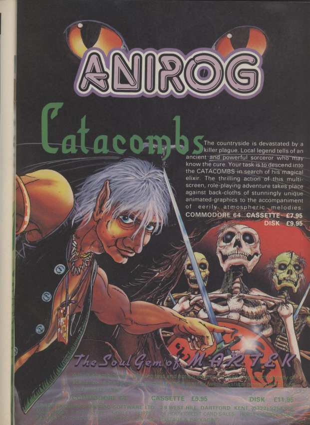
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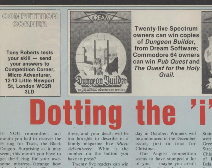
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## COMPETITION CORNER

**Tony Roberts tests your skill — send your answers to Competition Corner, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD**

**Twenty-five Spectrum owners can win copies of *Dungeon Builder*, from Dream Software; Commodore 64 owners can win *Pub Quest* and *The Quest for the Holy Grail*.**

# Dotting the 'i's



IF YOU remember, last month you had to recover the H ring for Tisch, the Black Dragon. Surprising as it may seem, this month you have to get the I ring for your awesome mistress. (strange how she can't do it herself!).

The I ring is hidden behind a massive metal door, beside which is this simple panel. On the panel, as you can see, are four letters i's, the dots on which are push buttons. Each letter i bears a four digit sequence of numbers. All Tisch knows is that one sequence differs from all the others and will open the door. The other three buttons are connected to booby traps; touch one of these, and your death will be too horrible to describe in a family magazine like *Micro Adventurer*. What is the number on the button you have to press?

Twenty five readers can win copies of Dream Software's *Dungeon Builder*, which enables Spectrum owners to design graphic adventure games. Commodore 64 owners can win *The Quest for the Holy Grail* and *Pub Quest*. Don't forget to say which micro you have.

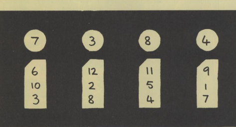
As a tie-breaker, complete the sentence "I want to win a copy of *Dungeon Builder* because..." in 12 words or less. Your entry must be received by the last working day in October. Winners will be announced in the December issue, just in time for Christmas.

Our August competition seems to have stumped a lot of you — maybe you aren't musically inclined. Anyway, 20 readers won themselves copies of Beyond titles — the following maestros will be receiving their prizes soon.

Jean Burgess of Leeds, M Jones of Gotham, Jose Johns of Harrow, Peter Field of Edgware, K Holland of BFPO 16, P Glasgow of Exeter, Dave Linsley of Jesmond, W Donald of Sittingbourne, E Furnival of Rochdale, Mark Clase of Brussels, S Williams of Staines, L Walsh of Isleworth, Mark Fox of Wood Green, Kathryn Norton of Streetly, Adam Harries of Chisledon, Fay McCulloch of Hayward's Heath, Peter Bela of Falmouth, Gordon Sneddon of Guildford, Martin Cross of Golders Green, and Robin Parry who didn't give us an address (please let us have it soon).

If you want to enter one of our competitions, you must remember to include your own address. We have to be able to read it too — so be sure to write it clearly. We get far too many right answers which don't have names or addresses on them.

Good luck!




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